

The GIRLS of CENTRAL HIGH *on* LAKE LUNA

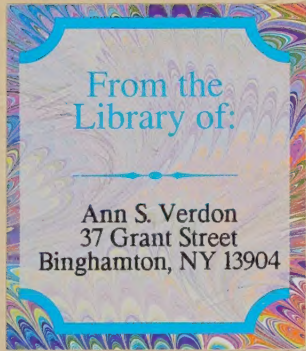


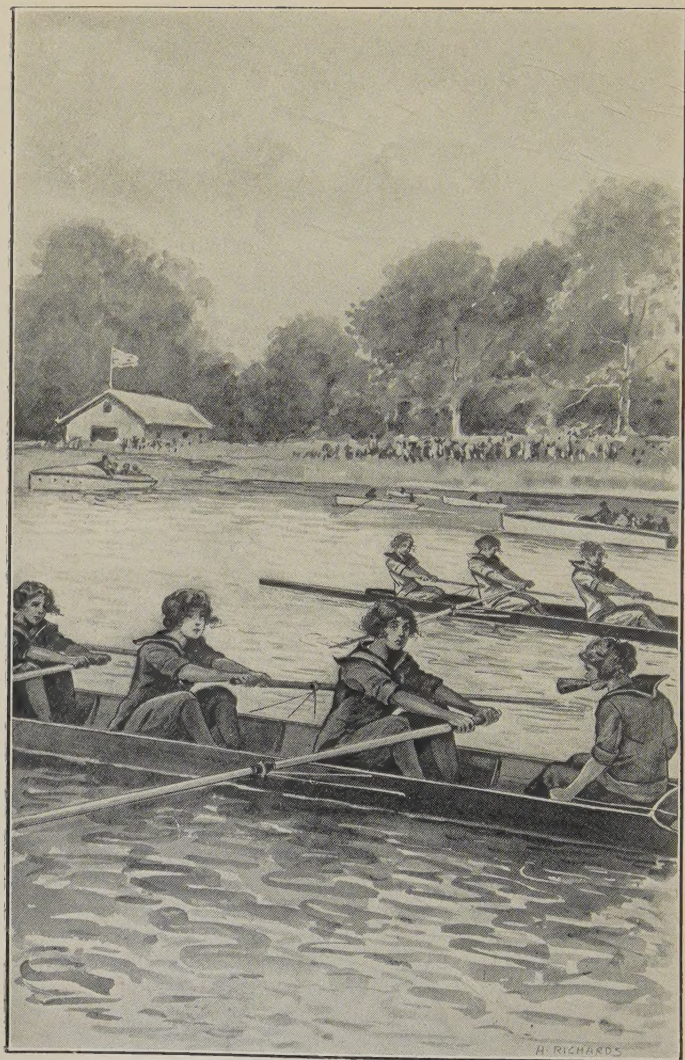
BY GERTRUDE W. MORRISON

300

Dec. 25, 14-

Dear Sister Clarice -
Merry Christmas to you
Beatrice





CENTRAL HIGH HAD WON!

Girls of Central High on Lake Luna.

(Frontispiece)—Page 196

The Girls of Central High on Lake Luna

OR
THE CREW THAT WON

BY
GERTRUDE W. MORRISON

AUTHOR OF THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH,
THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH AT BASKETBALL,
ETC.

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Or, The Champions of the School League

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON LAKE LUNA

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON LAKE LUNA

CHAPTER I

THE LONE MAN ON THE ISLAND

"THERE! I see him again," whispered Dora Lockwood.

A half-minute's silence, save for the patter of the drops from the paddles as the light cedar canoe shot around East Point of Cavern Island.

"So do I!" cried Dorothy, but in a low tone. "My! what frightful whiskers."

"He looks just like a pirate," declared her sister.

"He *is* a pirate—or a robber—I wager," returned Dorothy.

"Maybe he's one of those horrid men who robbed Stresch & Potter Tuesday night."

"Oh, Dora! Let's hurry by."

Both girls redoubled their efforts at the paddles and the canoe shot past the little cove which lay at the foot of the eminence known as Boulder

Head. The black hair and ferocious whiskers of the person upon whom they made these comments dipped down behind a big rock on the shore and disappeared.

"There! he's gone," sighed Dora, with relief.

"I'm glad. *Do* you suppose he had anything to do with the robbery at Stresch & Potter's department store? They say the thieves got more than ten thousand dollars."

"I don't know whether the lone pirate is one of them or not," laughed Dora; "but *somebody* must have committed the robbery—and why not he?"

"That's heartless," sniffed Dorothy. "They say that a small boy helped the robbers, too. They had to push a boy through the wire screen they cut out, and he opened a cellar door to let the robbers in."

"Don't I know that? And don't I know who is suspected, too?" returned Dora.

"Oh, Dora! Don't say it!" protested Dorothy, in horror.

"I don't say I believe it. But you know very well that Billy is up to all sorts of mischief."

"But Billy Long is one of our own boys."

"I know he goes to Central High. But all the boys who go to our school are not angelic."

"Far from it," sighed her sister, pensively.

"'And 'Short and Long' is a regular little *snipe*, sometimes!" said Dora, with emphasis.

"But to rob a store!" gasped her twin sister.

"He was seen around there the afternoon before. Why, I know that a policeman has been to his house looking for him, and nobody has seen Short and Long since Thursday night."

"But the robbery was committed some time Tuesday night."

"He wasn't suspected at first. Perhaps he thought nobody had noticed him helping the men in the afternoon."

"If they were the men—those surveyors."

"Of course they were!" cried Dora. "The city engineer's office sent no men to run that street line. Those fellows were taking measurements right back of Stresch & Potter's building—and Short and Long was helping them. And, now, when the hue and cry is raised, he's gone."

"Oh, Dora! It would be dreadful," sighed Dorothy. "One of our Central High boys."

"'And one that's always been just as full of mischief as an egg is full of meat," snapped Dora.

Now, supposing there had been a blind person in the canoe with the Lockwood sisters, that unfortunate person could never in this world have told which girl spoke at each time. Their voices

were exactly alike—the same inflection, the same turning of phrases, the exact tone.

Nor could this supposititious blind person—had his eyes been suddenly opened—have been able to tell the girls apart, either!

For Dora and Dorothy Lockwood were exactly the same height, of the same physical development, and with the same mannerisms and carriage. Both had a wealth of rather light brown hair, and that hair was tied with ribbons of exactly the same shade, and tied in exactly the same kind of bow. They possessed two pairs of very nice gray eyes, usually sparkling with fun. Each had a dimple at the left side of her pretty lips, and when they smiled that dimple came into prominence at once. The turn of their chins, the shape of their noses and ears, the breadth of their foreheads—every feature was the same. One's reflection in the looking-glass could be no more exactly like the original than was her sister.

So, unless some person was near enough to watch the play of the twins' lips, it would have been impossible to tell which girl spoke.

They had been paddling for some time—from the boat landing at the Girls' Branch Athletic Field of Central High, at Centerport, to the East Point of Cavern Island, and beyond.

Lake Luna was a beautiful body of water some twenty miles in length and a half-mile broad. Cavern Island lay in its middle directly opposite the city of Centerport. At the upper, or west end of the lake, lay Lumberport, another lively town, at the mouth of Rocky River; and at the far eastern end of the lake its waters flowed out through Rolling River at the city of Keyport.

Back of the city of Centerport, which was by far the largest and most important of the three, was a range of beautiful hills—hills which were now clothed in their mantle of full summer verdure. There was, about in the middle of the big town, a slight elevation occupied by the best residences. This “hill section” of Centerport was flanked on either hand by business portions of the city; but on the lake shore side of the Hill there were beautiful estates, boat clubs, bathing pavilions, and the new Athletic Field established for the use of the girls of Central High School, at which institution the Lockwood twins were pupils in their sophomore year.

The twins were, too, dressed alike, in very pretty blue and white boating costumes, with broad-brimmed canvas hats; but despite these hats they were as brown as berries, and the red blood showed through the tan on their cheeks

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like the hue of blush-roses. Their arms, bared to the elbow, were very brown, too.

A number of the girls of Central High were possessed of canoes; but none was a better paddler than the Lockwood twins. Either singly, or together, Dora and Dorothy, in competition with most of their mates, whether of sophomore, junior or senior class, could hold their own. Besides the twins rowed respectively Number 6 and Number 2 in the eight-oared shell.

For some few months now the girls of Central High had been particularly enthusiastic about athletics of all kinds. They were rivals for all athletic honors with the two other high schools of Centerport—the East and West Highs—as well as with the high school girls of Lumberport and Keyport.

Recently there had been a rowing race between these high school crews of eight, and the girls of Central High had been beaten. There were coming soon, however, the annual boat races and other aquatic sports on Lake Luna which were each year contested and supported by the athletic clubs of the three cities of the lake.

It was an all-day tournament, and it always embraced swimming, rowing and paddling for prizes, as well as fun in the shape of “bunting,” water-polo, marine hare and hounds, and other

games. But if the truth were told, the main interest of the Lockwood twins and their girl friends was at present centered in the eight-oared shell race between the five high schools.

As the twins swept on in their canoe, and turned Boulder Head, hiding the place where they had seen the bewhiskered poll of the individual whom Dora had called the lone pirate, she said:

"Do you suppose, Dory, that anybody will be good enough to really present the crew with a new shell?"

"Somebody's got to—if Central High is to win," declared Dorothy, vigorously.

"That's so. We can never beat East High with our old tub—let alone the Lumberport or Keyport eight."

"Leave it to Mother Wit," laughed Dorothy. "She has her thinking cap on."

"But we can't leave everything to Laura Belding," declared Dora. "She shouldn't be called upon to do everything. She got Colonel Richard Swayne interested in our Girls' Branch Athletic League, and so we are to have a fine new field, they say. That's enough for Laura to do."

"But Mother Wit is always turning up unexpectedly with something new," laughed Dorothy.

"And she says we must have a new shell in time to use it in the race on the big day."

"Who's launch is that, Dory?" asked her sister, suddenly.

A motor-boat had just come into sight around a point of the island ahead.

"Why—why—— Isn't that Pretty Sweet's *Duchess*?" asked Dorothy.

"Maybe. It's missing explosions dreadfully. Nasty thing! I don't like a motor boat."

"Well, a canoe or a sailboat is more fun, I believe, unless you want to go fast," said the other twin.

"Speed up, Dory. We can cross the bow of that boat. It *is* Purt's boat."

"And there are two other boys aboard."

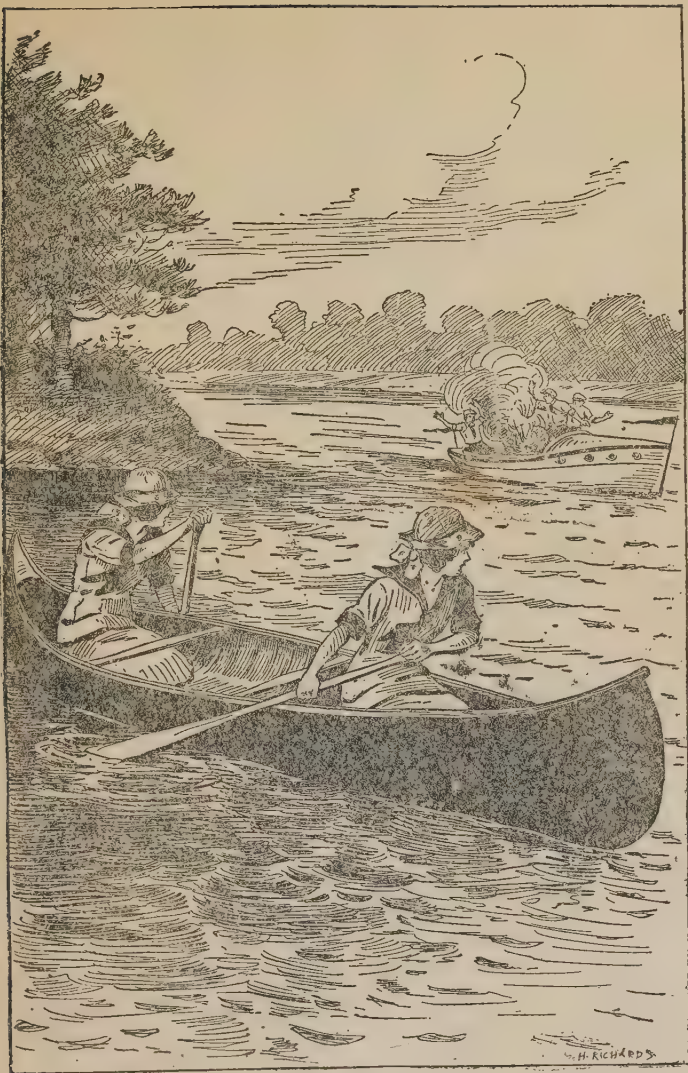
"Chet and Lance, I declare!"

"Laura said she and Jess were coming over to the island to-day; funny the boys aren't with them."

"Then somebody else would have to go with Purt, for he could never run that motor alone. Oh, look!"

As Dorothy spoke there was a big puff of smoke from the middle of the launch and they heard the boys shouting excitedly.

"Now you've done it, Purt!" was an exclamation the twins heard.



AS DOROTHY SPOKE THERE WAS A BIG PUFF OF SMOKE
FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE LAUNCH.

Girls of Central High on Lake Luna.

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Then flames shot up where the smoke had been and the twins both cried out.

"Their gasoline's afire! It's the tank!" exclaimed Dora.

She had scarcely spoken when there came a muffled report, another great balloon of smoke, and the launch seemed to be afire from end to end. Out of the smoke and flames three figures, one after the other, leaped into the lake, while the burning launch darted on across the path of the girls' canoe.

CHAPTER II

MISSING: THE SHORT AND LONG OF IT

"OH! OH!" cried Dora. "I hope they're not burned."

"But they'll be drowned!" gasped her sister.

"Chetwood Belding and Lance Darby won't drown, that's sure," returned Dora, but driving in her paddle vigorously.

"No, they can swim."

"And they won't let Prettyman Sweet drown, either."

The girls swept on at a splendid pace, paying no attention to the runaway and burning launch. They were anxious to reach the struggling boys.

"We can't take them aboard, Dora!" cried her sister.

"Of course not; but they can cling to the gun-wales——"

"And sink us."

"No, they won't."

"They'll tip us over. I don't want to get all wet," panted Dorothy.

"Here's another canoe!" cried Dora.

Out of a neighboring inlet shot a second cedar boat, also paddled by two girls.

"It's Laura and Jess!" cried Dorothy.

"Goody! now we can get the boys to shore all right," said Dora, with satisfaction. "Laura will know what to do. She always does."

Laura Belding, who was Chetwood Belding's sister, and who rejoiced in the nickname at school of "Mother Wit," was a girl who possessed a very quick mind. Her mates expected a good deal of her, therefore, and it was not surprising that Dora and Dorothy Lockwood should consider that the rescue of the three boys in the lake was a simple matter now that Laura had appeared upon the scene.

In the first volume of this series, entitled "The Girls of Central High; Or, Rivals for All Honors," Laura Belding's quick wit was displayed on several occasions—notably in her solving the problem of a fire that was discovered in the office of the principal of Central High School, Franklin Sharp.

But in that initial volume was told, too, of the beginning of after-hour athletics in Central High and of the interest the girls began to take in all manner of sports and games approved by the Girls' Branch Athletic League.

The girls of Central High had ever been loyal supporters of the boys' games—had "rooted" at all baseball, football, and rowing matches, and the like, for their particular colors; but now they were to take part themselves in various lines of athletics and sports, and their real interest in such things was, naturally, much increased.

But to properly develop the idea of the Girls' Branch Athletic League, which was formed at Central High, the need of a modern girls' athletic field was plain to both the girls themselves and their instructors. Centerport, although a moderately wealthy town, could not supply fifty thousand dollars, off-hand, for such a purpose; and that was the least sum needed for the establishment of an up-to-date building and field for winter bathing, basket-ball grounds, tennis courts, a cinder track, and a dancing lawn.

Perhaps Laura Belding was no more interested in the establishment of such a fine field than many other of the girls of the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Laura was a soph herself; but she saw ways and means to an end more quickly than the others. By chance she interested a very wealthy man—one Colonel Richard Swayne. The Colonel thought that little Miss Belding was quite the quickest-witted girl he had ever met. And, later, when Laura's bright

thought chanced to aid the Colonel's invalid daughter, the old gentleman began to take a deeper interest in the things that interested Laura.

So that, finally, through Colonel Swayne's generosity, the idea of a fine field for girls' athletics became a possibility. This coming summer, during the long vacation, it would be built, and the girls of Laura's class were very proud indeed of "Mother Wit."

Now the two canoes, propelled by the twins in one and Laura and her chum, Jess Morse, in the other, dashed toward the three boys in the water. The power launch, flaming merrily, was allowed to take its own sweet will across the lake.

"Now, don't you tip either of those canoes over, Purt!" Chet Belding was angrily shouting as the girls reached the trio of water-soaked voyagers. "Easy! You're not drowned yet."

"But, mercy, Chet!" squalled Prettyman Sweet, splashing madly. "I—I've swallowed—ugh!—so mu-mu-much water! Help!"

He went under again, for he could not swim. But Chet brought him up with a jerk, having still a hand upon the boy's collar.

"Stay up here!" growled Laura's brother. "Keep your face out of the water."

"But I want to, deah boy—dонтcher know!" gasped Purt.

"Yes; you want to; but you want to talk, too. Keep your mouth shut, then you won't get waterlogged," snapped Lance Darby, coming up on the other side.

"Oh! don't be harsh with him, boys," begged Dorothy Lockwood. "He's lost his boat."

"And that's his own fault. He *would* smoke a cigarette," said Chet, "and I told him the gasoline leaked."

"I wouldn't go in the old boat with him again for a farm down East with a pig on it!" declared Lance. "Now, easy! don't you dare swamp this canoe."

They made the almost helpless Purt seize the sharp stern of Laura's canoe with both hands. Then Chet swam beside him to keep him from dragging the girls' craft down, as Laura and Josephine Morse paddled for the shore of the island.

Lance followed on with the Lockwood canoe, and both reached the shore at about the same time. The Sweet boy struggled out upon the shore and lay down, almost overcome. But the other boys aided the girls in getting the cedar boats onto the shore, and out of harm's way.

"Nice mess we're in," gasped Lance, flinging himself down upon the sod, too. "Look at us!"

Not fit to appear on board the *Lady of the Lake*." That was the little steamer that transported passengers from Centerport to the amusement park at the west end of Cavern Island. Down at this end of the island the land was hilly and wild; but around the boat landing a park was laid out, with carrousels, a small menagerie, swings, and the like.

"Lo—lo—look at Purt!" burst out Jess, unable to hold in her laughter any longer. "What—what will his mo-mo-mother say when he gets home?"

Prettyman Sweet was, as Chet often declared, "the very niftiest dresser" in Central High. And even when he went motor-boating he was the very "glass of fashion." His fancy waist-coat would never be seen in its pristine lustre again, and as for the gaudy striped shirt and cuffs he had worn, the stripes were surely "fast" colors, in that they had immediately run into the white ground-work of the garment!

"I—I do-do-don't care," chattered Purt. "What are clothes, anyway? I'm dying of cold!"

"And in June," snorted Lance, with disgust.

"Let's build a campfire and warm him," suggested Laura.

"Haven't a dry match," declared her brother.

"I have. Don't catch me canoeing without a

tightly corked bottle of matches. I've been upset too many times," laughed Laura.

Chet and Lance gathered the wood; but Purt only lay and moaned and shivered. The adventure was a serious matter for the exquisite.

"And I bet this settles Purt's motor-boating for all time," scoffed Jess Morse. "Got enough, haven't you, Pretty?"

"Weally, Miss Morse, I am too exhausted to speak about it—weally!" gasped Purt.

"And it was the only sport Purt would go into," grunted Chet. "He could get somebody to run his boat for him, you see. All he had to do was to sit tight and hold his ears on."

Purt felt affectionately for his ears—they stuck out like sails from the side of his head, "trimmed flat across the masts"—and said nothing. He could not retort in his present condition of mind and body. But his schoolmates talked on, quite ignoring him.

"What were you two boys doing out in the *Duchess* this afternoon, anyway?" demanded Laura. "I thought you were going to see the game between Lumberport and the East High team?"

"Why," said Chet, hesitating, looking at Lance, "if we tell you, you'll keep still about it—all you girls?"

"Of course," said Jess.

"All of you, I mean," said Chet, earnestly. "No passing it around with the usual platter of gossip on the athletic field this evening."

"How horrid of you, Chet!" cried Josephine Morse.

But Laura only laughed. "We can keep a secret as well as any crowd of boys—and he knows it," she said.

"Well," said her brother, squatting before the campfire, that was now burning briskly, and spreading out his jacket to the blaze, while the legs of his trousers began to steam. "Well, it's about Short and Long."

"Billy Long!" gasped Dorothy, looking at her sister.

"Poor Billy!" added Laura. "What about him?"

"He's missing," said Chet, gravely.

"Missing: The Short and Long of It, eh?" chuckled Jess.

"This is no laughing matter, Jess," declared Launcelot Darby, sharply. "Haven't you heard of the robbery?"

"At Stresch & Potter's department store?" cried Jess. "Of course. What's that got to do with Short and Long?"

"Nothing!" declared Chet, vigorously.

"Anybody who says that Billy Long helped in that robbery deserves to be kicked. He's not that kind of a fellow."

"But he's accused," said Laura, gravely.

"Somebody said they saw him hanging about the rear of the store with some men Tuesday afternoon. The men appeared to be surveyors. They are supposed to be the robbers, for nobody seems to know anything about them at the city engineer's office," Chet continued.

"A small boy had to be put through the little basement window where a screen was cut out. No man could have slipped through it and then opened that door for the men. Short and Long is accused—at least, he is suspected. A policeman went to his house Friday morning; but Billy had gone away over night."

"That looks suspicious," declared Jess.

"No, it doesn't. It looks as if Billy was scared—as of course he was," exclaimed Chet. "Who wouldn't be?"

"That is so," murmured one of the twins.

"Well," sighed Chet, "we heard that he had been seen to take a boat at Norman's Landing, and thought maybe he'd come over this way. So, as Purt wanted a sail——"

"And a bath, it seems," chuckled Jess.

"We came over this way, looking into the coves and inlets for the boat Billy is said to have

borrowed. But we didn't see any sign of it, nor any sign of poor Billy. Of course he is innocent; but he's scared, and his folks are poor, and Billy was afraid to remain at home, I suppose, thinking he would get his father into trouble, too."

"It's a mean shame," said Lance. "What if Stresch & Potter were robbed of ten thousand dollars? They oughtn't to have accused a perfectly innocent boy of helping in the robbery."

"But that's it!" exclaimed Laura. "How is Billy to disprove the accusation if he runs away, and makes it appear that he is guilty?"

"Don't we see that?" demanded her brother. "That's what we want to get at Billy for. We want to catch and bring him back and make him face the music. Then we'll all prove him innocent and make these Smart Alecks take back what they've been saying about him. It's a shame!" cried Chet, again.

"It *is* a shame," agreed Laura.

But just then both the Lockwood twins burst out with:

"Maybe he *did* come over to the island."

"Huh! What for? To hide?" demanded Lance.

"Perhaps," said Dorothy.

"Maybe to find the robbers himself. Perhaps they are hiding here," said Dora.

"Likely," grunted Chet.

"We saw somebody hiding back yonder at the foot of Boulder Head," declared Dorothy.

"So we did! The lone pirate!" cried her sister.

"'The lone pirate'?" repeated Laura and Jess, in unison. "Who's that?"

The twins told them what they had seen—the bewhiskered man who had hidden behind the boulder. But the boys scoffed at the idea of the stranger having anything to do with the men who robbed the department store safe, or anything to do with Billy Long.

"No," said Chet, wearily. "He's gone somewhere. But we don't know where. And if the police catch him it will go hard with poor Short and Long."

CHAPTER III

TONY ALLEGRETTO

Now, "Short and Long," as the boys called him (christened William Henry Harrison Long) was a jolly little fellow and extremely popular at Centerport's Central High School—not so much with the teachers and adults of his acquaintance, perhaps, as with his fellow pupils. He was full of fun and mischief; but to the boys who knew him to be perfectly fair and honest, the accusation now aimed against him seemed preposterous.

It was true that his father was a poor man, and Billy Long seldom had any spending money. Naturally he was always on the outlook for "odd jobs" which would earn him a little something for his own pocket. He had been seen carrying the chain for the mysterious surveyors who had been in the vacant lot behind the department store that was robbed the Tuesday night previous to the opening of our story; but *that* should not

have made trouble for Short and Long. He did not let many such chances escape him when he was out of school.

Billy was the short-stop on the Central High nine and as Chetwood Belding and Lance Darby were important members of that team, too, they were naturally particularly interested in the missing youth.

The three boys who had so unceremoniously left the motor boat *Duchess* still stood around the hot fire on the shore, drying their garments. Purt Sweet was really a pitiful sight, his fancy clothing looking so much worse than that of his two companions. The girls were in gales of laughter over his plight.

Laura repeated in a sing-song voice:

“Double, double, toil and trouble,
Garments steam and Purt does bubble!”

“Now, Miss Laura,” complained the victim, “This is altogether too serious a matter, I assure you, for laughter. What ever shall we do to get home?”

“Well, we can’t walk,” chuckled Lance.

“Guess we’ll have to appear on the *Lady of the Lake*,” said Chet.

“My goodness! In *this* state?” mourned Purt. “Only fawncy!”

"You can't fly home," said Jess. "Somebody is bound to see you."

"Let's take off our shoes, wring out our socks, and put 'em on again, and then walk over to the amusement park," said Chet.

"And if you girls will paddle over we'll treat you to ice cream," added Lance.

"You are trying to bribe us—— I see," declared Laura, laughing again.

"Just so," said Lance. "We'll stand treat if you don't tell everybody how we had to jump out of Purt's old boat."

There was a good deal of laughter at this; but finally the four girls agreed and the boys helped them into the water again with their canoes. It was not far to the amusement park at the west end of Cavern Island, and the three partially dried boys arrived there about the time that the two canoes reached the landing.

There was a good deal of fun while the seven young folks were eating the cream. Purt Sweet slunk into his seat in the corner, striving to hide his bedraggled apparel. He tucked a paper napkin into the front of his waistcoat, and so hid the hideous color scheme of the gaudy shirt, the stripes of which had spread with wondrous rapidity. Then he buttoned his coat tightly to hide the ruined waistcoat; but the coat was tight anyway, and the ducking had done it no good.

"I believe, on my life, Purt," chuckled Chet, "that the coat is shrinking on you. That tailor cheated you this time—I know he did. If the coat gets much smaller, and you eat much more ice cream, you'll burst through the coat at all the seams like a full-blown cotton-blossom."

"Better let *me* eat the ice cream for you, old man," advised Lance, seriously. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself here."

"That's what I am," said Purt, sadly. "Fawncy meeting any of the Stricklands, or the Tarbot-Rushes, or General Maline's people, here when I'm in this condition. Weally, it is dweadful to contemplate."

"It's tough, I allow," said Chet callously. "What you need is a mask and a blanket to disguise yourself."

"You're not likely to meet any of Centerport's Four Hundred over here at Cavern Island Park," laughed Laura. "So you need not fear."

"I should think you would be just as ashamed presenting yourself before *us* as before those Maline girls," said Jess, tossing her head. "I am insulted. No! you cannot pay for my ice cream, Mr. Sweet. Chet will pay for it."

"Gee, Jess," chuckled Lance Darby. "If you eat more'n two dishes Chet will go broke. I know the state of his finances to-day. And Purt always has plenty of money."

"Weally, Miss Morse," urged Pretty, who was not usually prone to spend his money. "Weally, you must let me pay the check—for all. It is my treat, you know. And I assure you, I had no intention of saying anything to offend you."

"But you consider those Maline girls—and they are the homeliest girls in Centerport—of more importance than Laura and Dora and Dorothy and me. You're not ashamed to appear before us with your outfit all smudged up!"

"But, my dear Miss Morse!" gasped Pretty.

"Don't you 'dear' me, Mister!" ejaculated Jess, with every appearance of anger. "If I'm not as good as Sissy Maline——"

"Oh, you are! You are!" declared Purt, in haste. "You misunderstand. I am in this horrid state. But—you see—you saw it happen and realize that it was an unavoidable accident——"

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped Jess, still apparently unyielding. "If you hadn't tried to smoke a nasty cigarette——"

"Oh, I assure you it was a very mild one. I have them made extremely mild—and with my monogram on the paper. Weally, you know——"

"Horrid thing! You're the only boy who smokes them that we know. What do you say, girls? Sha'n't we cut Purt right off of our call-

ing lists if he doesn't give up monogrammed cigarettes?"

"They're the worst kind," murmured Chet. "The monogram makes 'em so much more deadly."

"I tried one of Purt's coffin nails once—ugh!" admitted Lance. "He calls 'em mild. But he's so saturated with nicotine that he doesn't know what 'mild' means. I believe they make his cigarettes out of rope-yarn and distilled opium. One puff made me ill all day."

"Impossible, dear boy!" gasped Purt.

"I believe it's as Lance says," said Laura, gravely. "And Purt sets a very bad example for the other boys."

"Sure!" grinned her brother. "We're all likely to run off and send for a thousand monogrammed cigarettes."

"What! what!" cried Jess. "Did Purt buy a *thousand*?"

"I—I had to, Miss Josephine, to get the monogram printed on the wrapper, you know."

"Come," said Laura, still with a serious air. "We must decide what is to be done with this culprit, girls."

"I think he should not be allowed to associate with any of the girls of Central High," said one of the twins.

"Or with the boys, either," suggested Lance.

"His example is dreadfully bad," said Jess.

"Weally! I assure you——" panted Purt, wriggling all over, and not quite sure whether the girls meant it, or were "rigging" him.

"Have you any more of those nasty cigarettes with you?" demanded Laura, sternly.

Purt, looking greatly abashed, hauled out a saturated case of seal leather and displayed nine of the pulpy looking things.

"So you only smoked one of them to-day?" was the next demand.

"And he only just got that lit when the vapor from the gasoline caught fire. Like to have burned him to death," grunted Chet.

"That single smoke was certainly a very expensive one for you, Master Purt," declared Laura. "For perhaps it has cost you your motor-boat. At least, it has cost you more than the whole thousand cigarettes were worth. Kindly throw those disreputable looking things away!"

Purt obeyed instantly by tossing case and all into the lake.

"Ugh! now you'll poison the fish," complained Jess.

"Never mind the fish," said Laura, still intent upon the victim. "Now, Purt, how many cigarettes have you left at home?"

"Oh—I—ah——"

"Do not prevaricate!" commanded the girl.
"Answer at once."

"Why—I—I have most of the thousand left," admitted Purt.

"Say! you always carry around a full case to flash on the fellows—I see you," cried Lance.

"Ye—es," admitted Purt.

"Tell the truth, sir! How many of the horrid things have you left at home?"

Purt looked up at her, blinked a couple of times, swallowed like a toad that has snapped up a live coal, and then blurted out:

"Nine hundred and ninety!"

At that a howl of laughter went up from the crowd.

"And—and you—you've nev—never smoked even *one*?" gasped Laura, at last.

"Not until to-day," replied the sadly abashed Purt.

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" cried Lance.
"And he's had those cigarettes for three months, I know!"

"Purt, you'll be the death of us yet," declared Chet Belding, wiping his eyes.

"I—I couldn't get used to the taste of them in my mouth," confessed the dude.

"You're more fun than a box of monkeys!" declared Lance.

"That reminds me, girls," said Chet, suddenly,

and picking up the checks to pay the bill before Purt Sweet could get around to it. "There's an enormously funny monkey over here. Trained to a hair. I saw him over in Centerport when his owner brought him through——"

"I saw that monkey—with a piano organ. And such a nice looking Italian with it," declared Laura.

"Look out, Lance," whispered Chet, grinning, "she likes the romantic and dark complexioned style in heroes. Get some walnut stain and a black wig."

"Why, he was playing in the streets, over in town," said Jess.

"That was just to advertise his act before the season opened," declared Chet. "So he told me."

"All right," Laura said. "The boat isn't due yet, so we might as well remain with you boys until it comes and so keep you out of mischief."

"But I really look so badly——" began Purt.

"Never mind. You won't meet the Maline girls here," snapped Jess, as though she were still very angry with him.

"Come on, Purt—be a sport," whispered Lance, with a wicked grin. "It won't cost you anything except what you give to the monkey—and that's a private affair between you and the monk you know."

It was true that Sweet was a "tight-wad," as the boys expressed it. He would spend any amount of money on himself, or to make a show; but liberality was not one of his virtues.

The young folks were not long in finding the booth, across which was painted a straggling sign reading:

TONY ALLEGRETTO AND HIS
PERFORMING MONKEY

"Which is the 'monk'?" demanded Lance, in a whisper, when they saw two very gaily dressed figures on the tiny platform before the booth.

The Italian himself was a short, agile young man, but not ill-looking. He had splendid teeth, and they showed white and even behind his smile, for his face was dusky and his mustache as black as jet, as was his hair. He was dressed in a gay, if soiled, Neapolitan costume, and the monkey was dressed in an imitation of his master's get-up. It was a large monkey, with a long tail and a solemn face, not at all the ordinary kind of monkey that appears with organ grinders.

The Italian began to grind his organ when he saw the accession of the young folk from Central High to his crowd of spectators. They made a goodly audience and Tony Allegretto—if that was his name—began his open-air performance.

"Aria from 'Cavalleria Rusticana' to inaugurate the performance of a monkey," chuckled Jess. "How are the mighty fallen!"

Suddenly Tony changed the tune and spoke a sharp word in Italian to the monkey. Instantly the creature went to the front of the platform, took off his cap, bowed to the audience with hand and cap upon his heart, and then began to dance.

It was a rather melancholy dance, but he turned and twisted, while Tony scolded and threatened in a low voice.

"Gee!" exclaimed Lance. "That's the monkey that put the 'tang' in 'tango'—eh, what?"

"Poor little thing!" said the Lockwood twins together.

"I don't believe he likes to do that," said Laura.

"He ought to be taken away from that man and sent to school," declared Chet, with gravity in his face but a twinkle in his eye.

"He'd do quite as well in his classes as some of you boys, I have no doubt," said Jess, quickly. "At least, Professor Dimp says you act like a lot of monkeys sometimes."

"Old Dimple is prejudiced," declared Lance. "He ought to see *this* monkey act. Phew! see him whirl. There! that's over. Now what next?"

CHAPTER IV

A SOLEMN MOMENT

THE dance of the performing monkey had ceased and its owner changed the tune on the piano-organ again. He handed the monkey a little toy gun with one hand while he still turned the crank with the other. The monkey threw the gun down petulantly at first, but Tony threatened him and finally the animal held it when it was thrust into his hands.

"That monk certainly does understand Italian," admitted Lance. "I bet they are related."

"Lance is 'sore' on the Italian because he thinks Laura admires Tony," chuckled Chet.

"Be still!" commanded Laura. "You had better be nice to us girls or we won't keep the secret of how you boys took an involuntary bath to-day."

"'Nuff said," growled Chet. "I'm dumb."

The monkey was changing the gun from hand to shoulder, and holding it in different positions

supposedly in imitation of a soldier's drill. But some of the audience laughed at its awkwardness.

"The Italian army must drill differently from ours," said Dora Lockwood.

"Did you ever see anything so funny?" laughed her twin.

Tony overheard them and his eyes flashed. He boxed the poor monkey on the side of the head, and it ran chattering to the end of its line.

"Aw, say!" exclaimed the good natured Lance. "Isn't that mean?"

"It's not a very smart monkey at that," said a man in the crowd.

"Hi!" exclaimed Tony, suddenly, "you think-a da monk can't do anything? He don't lik-a da silly treek—eh? Look now! I lock de door—so," and suiting his action to his words the Italian turned the big brass key in the lock of the booth door. He shook the door to show that it was fastened. Then he turned to the monkey again. "Bébé!" he commanded, harshly, pointing to the door, and rattled off some command in his own language which the audience did not understand. But the monkey seemed to understand it.

He looked at his master, ran to the end of his line, looked back at Tony, chattered, and then seized the big key. He turned it carefully, still

looking over his shoulder at Tony, who appeared not to notice him, and ground the organ furiously.

The lock must have been well oiled, for the monkey turned the key very easily. Then he turned the knob of the door quite as carefully, all the time appearing to be afraid that he would be caught at it. For the first time the monkey actually betrayed some ability as an actor.

He pushed open the door, still keeping a sharp watch upon his master. Slowly he wedged his way into the booth. In a moment he had snatched something from the table inside and was back again upon the platform, with his mouth full, and munching rapidly, with his face hidden from his master.

The crowd laughed and applauded. Tony considered this a good time to take up the collection and he gave the monkey his cup. The little fellow made a polite bow to every person who dropped anything into the cup. At those who did not contribute Béb  chattered angrily.

"He's just as cunning as he can be," said Dorothy, as they turned away. "But I don't believe that man treats the monkey kindly."

"Here comes the boat!" exclaimed Chet. "We've got to leave you, girls. Don't get into any trouble, now, paddling home."

"Don't you fear for us," returned Dora, confidently.

"Let's race back to Centerport!" proposed Jess.

"No," said Laura, as the girls tripped down to the landing where they had left their canoes.

"It is too far and Mrs. Case warns us not to over-exert, paddling."

"She's a fuss-budget," declared Jess, pouting.

"She's the best physical instructor in Centerport, and we're lucky to have her at Central High," said Dorothy, loyally.

"We're supposed to be in training for the boat races, too," said Dora.

The girls got aboard nicely and started across the lake. It was a calm day and there were scarcely any ripples; therefore there was little likelihood of the girls getting into any trouble. Half way across they saw a second motor-boat towing the burned *Duchess* toward the city. The fire was out, but the girls saw that poor Purt would have to spend some of his money in repairing the craft.

The four girls reached the school boathouse and had their canoes drawn out and put carefully away. Then they separated, for the Lockwood twins did not live on the same street as Laura and her chum.

The Lockwood cottage was set in a rather large plot of ground, which was mostly given up to Mr. Lockwood's nursery and hot-houses. The twins' father was wrapped up in his horticultural experiments, and as they had no mother the two girls were left much to their own devices. Mrs. Betsey Spink kept house for the Lockwoods, and had been the twins' nurse when they were little. She was a gentle, unassuming old lady, who "mothered" the girls as best she knew how, and shielded absent-minded Mr. Lockwood from all domestic troubles. The neighbors declared that the Lockwood household would have been a very shiftless establishment had it not been for Mrs. Betsey.

Mr. Lockwood seldom knew how the bills were paid, what the girls wore, or how the house was run. His mind was given wholly to inventing new forms of plant life. He experimented with white blackberries, thornless roses, dwarf trees that bore several kinds of fruit on different limbs, and, of late, had tried to cultivate a seedless watermelon. He was always expecting to make a fortune out of some of his novel experiments; but as yet the fortune had not materialized.

But he was a most lovable gentleman, and the twins were as proud of him as though he was the

most successful man in Centerport. Mr Lockwood had one cross to bear, however—a thorn in the flesh which troubled him on occasion very much. This was a certain very practical sister—the twins' Aunt Dora. Fortunately Aunt Dora lived in another city; but she was apt to make unexpected visits to her brother, and when she came to the Lockwood house there was no peace for any of the inmates while she stayed.

As the twins on this occasion entered the premises by the back gate they saw certain windows on the second floor of the house wide open, and the curtains drawn back. They halted in something more than astonishment, and looked at each other solemnly.

“That's Aunt Dora's room!” gasped Dora.

“She's here!” returned Dorothy, in the same awe-struck voice.

“Oh, dear!” sighed her twin.

“*Now* we're in for it,” rejoined Dorothy.

Then both together they exclaimed: “Poor papa!”

It was a solemn moment for the whole household, and the twins felt it.

CHAPTER V

AUNT DORA

"I FEEL just like running away," said Dora, "and staying until Auntie goes."

"Don't do it," begged Dorothy, "for I shall have to go, too."

"Poor papa!" they both exclaimed again.

"No. We shall have to stay and brace papa up," admitted Dora.

"We've just *got* to," groaned her twin.

"And if she begins to nag him again about giving one of us up——"

"We won't leave him," declared Dorothy, very firmly.

"I wouldn't live at her house for a fortune!" repeated Dorothy.

"Come on! let's see how the land lies," suggested Dora. "Perhaps the worst of it's over."

"No such luck," groaned Dorothy. "There's Betsey."

They ran up the winding path to the kitchen porch. The gentle, pink-faced old lady who met them at the door, had a worried brow.

"Hush, girls! you're aunt is here," she whispered.

"We know it. We saw the windows of the best room wide open. Is she making Mary clean the room all over again?"

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Betsey. "Your aunt declared it smelled musty from being shut up. She has *such* a nose," and the little old lady shook her head.

"Interfering old thing!" snapped Dora.

"Hush! you must not speak so," admonished Mrs. Betsey.

"Well, she *is*," declared Dorothy, of course agreeing with her twin.

"Where is she?" queried Dora.

"With your father in the hot-house."

"Come on, then," said Dora to her sister.

"Let's get it over right away."

They heard voices in the conservatory, for the sashes were open on this warm day. There was the stern, uncompromising tone of Aunt Dora, and the gentle, worried voice of Mr. Lockwood. The twins never liked to hear their father's voice when he was worried, and they saw to it—with Mrs. Betsey—that it did not occur frequently. But there was no help for it when Aunt Dora was about!

First of all, the twins heard their aunt say:

"You're no more fit to bring up girls, Lemuel, than I am to steer one of of these dratted airships the papers are full of!"

"No. You are right," said Mr. Lockwood. "The comparison is just. You would *not* do well in an airship, Dora."

"Huh! I should think not! And you're as little fit to bring up two girls—and twins, at that!"

"But—but I don't really bring them up," said Mr. Lockwood, apologetically. "Mrs. Betsey does that."

"Mrs. Betsey!" with a sniff.

"And really, they get along very well, Sister."

"They get along well because they are no trouble to you."

"Well, isn't that as it should be? They are good girls—and loving girls."

"I declare to man! Lemuel Lockwood, you haven't any more idea of what those girls need than a babe unborn."

"What *do* they need, Dora?" asked worried Mr. Lockwood.

"They need a strong hand—a stern and uncompromising spirit to govern them—that's what they need!" declared the militant aunt.

"But Dora, they are good girls and make me no trouble at all."

"Of course they make you no trouble. You let them do exactly as they wish."

"No, no!" urged Mr. Lockwood, hastily. "They don't always do as they wish. Sometimes we haven't the money to let them do *with*. I've heard Mrs. Betsey say so. And—and—why, there is one of them who likes three lumps of sugar in her coffee; but I always reprove her for it. That is extravagance."

"Huh!" sniffed Aunt Dora.

"Otherwise they are no trouble to me at all," said Mr. Lockwood, briskly. "They are not, I assure you. We live a very quiet and peaceful life here."

"Yah!" exclaimed his sister. "That is all you want—peace."

"I admit it—I admit it," returned her brother. "I am naturally retiring and of a peaceful disposition, Dora."

"You're a natural born fool, Lemuel!" declared his sister, so sharply that the twins, who were inadvertently listening at the door, hesitating to go in, fairly jumped. "I want to tell you right now that you are a disgrace to manhood! You've never amounted to a row of beans since you were out of pinafores. If your little property wasn't tied up hard and fast so that you could only use the income of it, you would have

frittered it all away long ago, and left these children penniless. You've never made a dollar in your life, Lemuel Lockwood!"

"But—but there has never been any real necessity for me to make money," stammered the horticulturist. "And one of these days we are going to have a plenty. I've got a melon started here on the bench, Dora——"

"You needn't show me any of your nasty plants. They're all ridiculous. And it isn't plants we're talking about. It's girls. Mercy knows how an inscrutable Providence ever came to allow two helpless girl babies to fall into your hands, Lemuel. But they're here and you've the burden of them. One would be more than you could manage properly; but two is ridiculous. I'd undertake, as I have told you before, to bring my namesake up as a girl *should* be brought up—and that will leave more money for you to fritter away on your hot-beds and cold-frames, and the like," she added, slyly.

"Dora!" exclaimed Mr. Lockwood, with a quaver in his voice, "do you really think I am not doing my duty by Dora and Dorothy?"

"Think it?" sniffed his sister. "I know it! And everybody else with sense knows it. How can a mere man bring up twin girls and give them a proper start in life?"

“But Mrs. Betsey does her very best——”

“And what does *she* know?” demanded his sister. “Does she ever read papers upon the proper management of girls? Or magazine articles upon what a young girl should be taught by her parents? Or books upon the growth and development of the girlish mind?”

“No—o,” admitted Mr. Lockwood. “I am very sure Mrs. Betsey never has time for such reading.”

“Then what does she know about it?” demanded Aunt Dora, triumphantly.

“But they are hardly ever sick—and how pretty they both are!” sighed the father of the twins.

“Bah! never sick! pretty!” ejaculated Aunt Dora, staccato. “What about their souls, Lemuel Lockwood? What about the development of their minds? Have you done aught to make them stern and uncompromising when they meet the world on an equal footing—as all women shall in the time to come? Are you preparing them for their work in life? Are they prepared to take the helm of affairs and show Man how Woman can guide affairs of moment?”

“I—I hope not!” murmured Mr. Lockwood, aghast. “They are just girls going to school, and studying, and having fun, and loving each

other. No, Dora, the stern duties of life have not troubled them as yet, thank God!"

"But they should be beginning to realize them, Lemuel," declared his sister. "Life is not fun. There is no time to dawdle around with plays, and athletics, and such foolishness. Where are they this minute, Lemuel Lockwood?"

"Why—why, they went out on the lake."

"In what?"

"A' canoe, I understand."

"And what's a canoe?" gasped Aunt Dora. "Is *that* a proper thing for young girls to ride in? Why! it's a savage boat—an Indian boat. A canoe, indeed!"

"But I scarcely can think there is any harm in their paddling a canoe. Many of their school-mates do so, and their physical instructor, Mrs. Case, approves."

"It is no business for my namesake to be in," declared Aunt Dora. "You named her after me, Lemuel, and I feel that I have some right to her. She having no mother, and I being her godmother, she is more mine than anybody else's. And I am determined to take her home with me."

"Take Dora?" gasped Mr. Lockwood. "Whatever should we do without her?"

"Hah!" exclaimed his sister. "You have the other one."

"But—but it doesn't seem as though one would be complete without the other," said Mr. Lockwood, thoughtfully. "They have always been together. Why, nobody knows them apart——"

"And that's another foolish thing!" exclaimed Aunt Dora. "To allow two girls to reach their age and have nobody able to distinguish between them. Dressing them just alike, and all! It is ridiculous."

"But they have always wished to be just alike, Sister," said the father of the twins.

"*They* wished!" exclaimed Aunt Dora. "Is it *their* place to have their way in such affairs? That is exactly what I say, Lemuel—you're not fit to manage the girls. And I am determined to save one of them from the results of your mismanagement. I have always noticed," added Aunt Dora, a little less confidently, "that Dora is much more amenable in disposition than Dorothy. Naturally, being named after me, she may have taken on more reasonable and practical characteristics than her sister."

Mr. Lockwood was a thin little man, with wisps of gray hair over his ears, a bald crown, on which he always wore a skullcap, and meek side whiskers. But now he stood and stared in perfect amazement at his sister, demanding:

"Do you mean to tell me you have noticed such characteristics in Dora?"

"Certainly," said his sister, complacently.

"Then you know them apart?"

"Well—er—when I have the opportunity of comparing their manner and speech——"

"Here they are!" exclaimed the harassed father, suddenly spying the girls behind his sister. "If you can tell which is which, you are welcome to. I leave it to the girls themselves. If Dora wishes to go with you, she may. I—I wash my hands of the affair!"

CHAPTER VI

WHICH IS WHICH?

MR. LOCKWOOD had a habit of getting out of difficulties in this way. He frequently "washed his hands" of affairs, finding that they adjusted themselves somehow without his aid, after all.

But on this present occasion there was, perhaps, a special reason why he should tell his sister to go ahead, and leave the matter entirely with her and the twins themselves. Aunt Dora claimed to be able to tell the girls apart—something that nobody, not even Mrs. Betsey, had been able to do since they were little tots and Dora had worn a blue ribbon on her wrist, and Dorothy a pink.

The twins, who had heard all the foregoing conversation, and understood the situation thoroughly, advanced when their Aunt Dora turned to meet them.

"Kiss me, my dears," commanded the militant lady, opening her arms. "Dora, first!"

But the twins ran in together and one kissed her on one cheek while the other placed her sa-

lute on the other—and at exactly the same moment. Aunt Dora adjusted her eyeglasses, stood off a yard or so, and stared at the girls.

“Dora,” she said, solemnly, “you are going home with me.”

Neither girls changed color, or showed in the least that the announcement was either a pleasant one, or vice versa.

“Do you hear?” demanded their aunt.

“Yes, ma’am,” they replied, in chorus.

“I spoke to Dora,” said the lady, firmly.

Not a word said the twins.

“Which is which, Dora?” asked Mr. Lockwood, from the background, and perhaps enjoying his sister’s discomfiture. “I declare nobody in *this* house has been able to tell them apart since they were in their crib. Mrs. Betsey declares she believes they used to exchange ribbons when they were toddlers, for she used to find the bows tied in funny knots.”

The two girls looked at each other with dancing eyes, but said nothing. It had been their sport all their lives to mystify people about their several identities. And here was a situation in which they determined—both of them—to keep their aunt guessing.

“This is no matter for flippancy,” said Aunt Dora, sternly. “I intend to take my namesake home with me, and to bring her up, educate her,

and finally share my fortune with her. Do you understand this fully?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the twins.

"I am speaking to Dora," their aunt said tartly.

The girls were silent.

"I am separating Dora from her sister for her own good. As you girls grow older you will find that the income your father has remaining will barely support one girl in a proper manner. To divide his responsibility is a kindness to him——"

"That is not so," interjected the mild Mr. Lockwood. "You are more than welcome, girls, to all I have. And—possibly—I might look about and get a little more money for you to use, as time goes on. If you need it——"

"We know all about it, Papa," chimed the twins. "We are satisfied."

"Does that mean you are satisfied to remain here, Dora?" demanded their aunt, insisting upon speaking as though but one girl heard her.

"We are both satisfied," chorused the twins, quickly.

"But I am *not* satisfied with the affair," declared Aunt Dora. "It has long been both my intention and desire to take my namesake—my godchild—away from here. While you two girls were small it was all very well to declare

it cruel to separate you. But you are old enough now——”

“We shall never be old enough, Auntie, to wish to be separated,” said one of the twins.

“Nonsense, child!” exclaimed Aunt Dora, her eyes sparkling as she thought she had at last obtained an inkling to the identity of the two girls.

“You will soon get over all that, Dora—of course you will.”

“I am sure I should not so soon get over separation from my sister,” said the other girl.

Her aunt wheeled on this one. “Do you mean to tell me that you scorn my offer?”

“If I were Dora I should beg to be excused,” returned the niece to whom she had spoken.

Aunt Dora whirled again and transfixed the other with decided satisfaction and a sparkling eye.

“But Dora, I feel sure, will go with her aunt gladly,” cried the lady.

“If I were Dora I should beg to be excused,” repeated the girl at whom she looked, in exactly the same tone, and with an unmoved countenance, too.

“I declare!” gasped Aunt Dora, in complete exasperation. “You’ve managed to get me puzzled, now. Which—which of you is t’other?”

“That is for you to find out, Auntie,” said both girls in unison.

"You saucy minxes!" began the lady, but one of the girls said, quickly:

"Oh, no. We don't mean to be saucy. But we have agreed not to tell on the other. Father leaves it to us and to you, Auntie. Neither of us wish to leave our dear, dear home. Therefore we shall not tell you which is Dora, and which is Dorothy."

"That is quite true, Auntie," said the other twin.

"Well, I declare to Nature!" exclaimed their Aunt. "Here I come offering Dora everything that a girl of her age should count as worthy—a home of wealth, a better education than she can get here in Centerport—college to follow—the open sesame into society—real society—— And do you two girls mean to tell me that neither will say which is Dora?"

"That is exactly what we have agreed upon," said one of the twins, quietly.

"Then, let me tell you, Miss, I shall find out for myself!" exclaimed the angry lady. "I consider you at fault for this, Lemuel. Shows your bringing up. It is sheer impudence!"

"I—I have washed my hands of it, Dora," said her brother, weakly.

"Well, you can wipe 'em, too!" snapped the lady. "But I mean to take Dora home with me when I go back—and that will be very soon,"

and she whisked away in her rustling skirts, leaving the father and his two daughters alone.

They twined around the little man in a moment, the two winsome, loving girls—one upon one side, the other upon the other.

"You don't want to lose Dora, do you, dear?" demanded Dorothy.

"Nor Dorothy either?" demanded Dora.

"I certainly do not, my dear girls," cried the much harassed Mr. Lockwood.

"Then we shall not tell her. We shall tell nobody. Nobody shall know which is which—as long as Aunt Dora remains, that is sure," cried Dora.

"Exactly," agreed her sister. "As long as papa doesn't wish us to go——?"

"Never!" declared Mr. Lockwood.

"Why, we're never even going to get married!" ejaculated the other twin.

"Of course not," said her sister. "There couldn't possibly be two men just alike, and they'd have to be just alike to please us for husbands."

Mr. Lockwood laughed. It was the first happy sound he had made in two hours. His sister had arrived exactly two hours before.

"I know I can safely leave the whole affair to you girls," he said, gratefully. "Have it out with your auntie, if you must. But do, *do*, leave me in peace."

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO GET A NEW SHELL

THE Lockwood twins were members of the executive committee of the Girls' Branch of Central High and that Saturday an important meeting was to be held in one of the school offices. So Dora and Dorothy stole away after supper, with only a word to Mrs. Betsey as to their goal. They did not want any more words that night with their aunt, who had sat, like a graven image (providing a graven image has a very hearty appetite) all through the evening meal in an attitude of great offense.

The committee, whose actions had to be passed upon by Mrs. Case, the physical instructor, and Franklin Sharp, principal of the school, numbered among its members Laura Belding and her chum, Josephine Morse; Nellie Agnew, Dr. Agnew's daughter; Hester Grimes and Lily Pendleton, all sophomores and in the classes at Central High with the Lockwood twins. Hester Grimes, who was the daughter of a wealthy wholesale butcher, was not so well liked by the twins as

some of the other sophomores. Hester could be a very unpleasant person if she wished to be—and on occasions in the past (as related in the previous volume of this series) Hester had lived up to her unhappy reputation. Lily Pendleton, however, usually backed Miss Grimes up in everything the latter said or did.

Although Laura Belding was only finishing her sophomore year at Central High, she had become so popular that she was chairman of this important committee, in which, in fact, the policy of the Girls' Branch Athletics was decided. The moment the old business had been disposed of and the way was open for new matters, Laura burst out with:

"Oh, girls! I've got the most exciting thing to tell you!"

"Don't tell us of any other big robbery," sighed Nellie Agnew. "We've heard nothing but robbery at our house ever since Stresch & Potter were broken into. And poor Billy Long!"

"Humph!" muttered Hester Grimes. "I hope they catch him and that he gets all that is coming to him. He always was a mean little brat!"

"Not at all!" cried one of the seniors. "Billy Long never did a mean thing in his life. But he *is* full of mischief."

"He'll get it, I fancy if the police catch him," laughed Lily Pendleton, unpleasantly.

"Order!" said Laura, gravely. "I did not introduce my subject in a very proper way, I know; but the trouble of Billy Long is far from our business to-night. As chairman of your committee I have received a communication which originally came from the Luna Boat Club. That is the wealthiest boat club on the lake, you know. They really have more to do with our Big Day than any other organization. 'And what do you think?'"

"Why don't you get to it?" demanded Hester. "You're as slow as cold molasses running up a hill in January."

"Oh, give her a chance," admonished Jess, taking any criticism of her chum—but her own—in ill part.

"Well," said Laura, unruffled, "the secretary of the Luna Boat Club writes that the club as a whole is much interested in the trial of speed between the eight-oared shells of the several Girls' Highs and as a trophy for that particular race will present to the winner a silver cup—and you can just bet, girls, if it is anything the Luna Club presents, it will be a handsome one. Isn't that fine?"

"Oh, if we could only win it!" cried Jess, clasping her hands.

"You've got about as much chance of winning over Keyport as I have of flying," said Hester Grimes.

"If goodness is necessary to your wearing wings, Hester, I am afraid you really haven't much chance," said one of the seniors, sweetly, and there was a little giggle of approval from the younger girls.

"It is a sure thing that we can't win with our old tub," agreed Laura, nodding a thoughtful head.

"Pah!" snapped Hester. "You girls in that eight couldn't win anyway."

"I don't know why you say that, Hester," complained Nellie Agnew, who pulled Number 5 in the eight-oared shell. "We do our very best."

"That's what I say," laughed the Grimes girl. "And your 'very best' is about as slow as anything on the lake."

"Let me tell you that doesn't sound very loyal to the school, Miss," spoke up another senior.

"And who's to teach *me* how to talk?" demanded Hester, tossing her head. "I am not asking you, Miss."

"Order, please!" commanded Laura, firmly. "It is not a question of how badly or how well the eight rows. Not just now. We have re-

ceived a notice of this prize. We must respond properly to the secretary of the Luna Club."

This item was disposed of; but Laura had another thing connected with it on her mind.

"It is quite true," she said, "that with the old shell we have been rowing in, it will be perfectly impossible for our eight to win the race. We are all agreed on that?"

"And all the same ones are agreed that you couldn't win in *any* boat," declared Hester, in her very meanest way.

"Now, I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Hessie," complained Nellie Agnew.

"And it isn't so, either!" exclaimed Jess Morse.

"Give us a good shell and we'll show you," said Dorothy Lockwood.

"That is what we need," agreed her twin.

"Of course we can win under any decent circumstances," said Laura, "now that we have Bobby Hargrew to be coxswain again."

Hester was silenced for the time. "Bobby," or Clara Hargrew, had been in difficulties with the school authorities a few weeks before, and had been debarred from all the after-hour athletics—and Hester Grimes had been partly to blame for Bobby's trouble.

"The point of the whole matter is," said Celia Prime, one of the older girls, who was on the

point of graduating from Central High, "that the eight need and must have a new shell. Our present boat is a disgrace."

"I object to our centering all our efforts upon that particular boat and crew," snapped Hester.

"So do I," declared Lily, her chum.

"The canoes and the single and double oars have better chances to win than the eight," pursued Hester. "We are centering on the eight because the bulk of the present crew are members of this committee."

"That is not so, Hessie," declared Mary O'Rourke, another senior who rowed in the eight.

"The whole school is interested," said a junior member of the executive board. "The girls talk more about the eight than about anything else."

"And that talk is all very skilfully worked up by Laura, here, and her friends," declared Hester. "Oh! some of us have eyes and ears, I hope."

"And a tongue that is hung in the middle and wags both ways!" whispered Jess.

"We are wrangling without coming to any conclusion," said Laura, sighing. "What shall we do about the shell? Can we get a new one——"

"Who'll buy it for us?" demanded Lily.

"That's just it," agreed Laura.

"Let's ask our folks to all chip in a quarter," said Jess.

"If the parents of every girl at school did that we'd scarcely be able to buy a new shell," returned the chairman.

"I know that my father will never give a penny toward a new shell—not while the crew remains as inefficient as it is at present," said Hester, tossing her head.

"But if you were in Celia's place, at stroke," snapped Jess, who was rather peppery in temper, "I suppose he would go right down into his pocket and purchase a boat for us himself?"

"Perhaps he would, Miss Smartie!" returned the butcher's daughter.

"Any change in the crew is up to Mrs. Case and the girls of the association—you know that, Hessie," Laura said, gravely. "We all got our positions because the instructor thought we were the better rowers——"

"Oh, bah!" ejaculated the angry Hester. "We all know how *you* are favored in everything, Miss! As for the new shell—I sha'n't do a thing toward helping get one; make up your mind to that."

"That certainly is a terrible stroke of bad news, Hester," drawled one of the older girls.

"Now, you would better keep still and let some of the rest of us talk a while. For a sophomore, you have a lot to say that is inconsequential."

Some of the younger girls chuckled at this. But the occasion and the dispute itself were too serious to engender much hilarity. The question of the new shell was exhaustively discussed, and it was finally decided that a subscription paper be drawn and presented to the parents and friends of Central High, and a sufficient sum be raised immediately, if possible, to pay for a new eight-oared shell.

At the break-up of the meeting Laura Belding spoke to several of the girls, including the twins, of a little junket that had been planned for Monday afternoon after school. Dora and Dorothy, Jess Morse, Nellie Agnew, and several other sophomores were invited to come to school prepared to ride directly from the school gate in automobiles into the country beyond Robinson's Woods, to a farmer's, whose family some of the girls already knew.

"Eve Sitz's father raises the most luscious berries, and they are right at their height, Eve telephoned me to-day," said Laura. "She wants to give us a real strawberry festival Monday evening—and there is a moon for us to come home by. Chet and Lance and a lot of the boys

will go along, too. We're going to have Mr. Purcell's sight-seeing auto as well as our own, and they will hold all of us comfortably."

"Goody!" cried Dora Lockwood. "You are always thinking up the most perfectly scrumptious things to do, Laura!"

"Most perfectly scrumptious," repeated Nellie, laughing. "If Gee Gee heard you say that, Miss—— Ahem!—was it Dora or Dorothy?"

The girls laughed, but the other twin shook her head seriously. "There is no Dora at present. We are both Dorothy Lockwood," and when their friends demanded an explanation, the story of Aunt Dora's determination to take her namesake home with her to live came out in a torrent.

"I'm glad I'm not a twin," declared Jess Morse, laughing till her sides ached. "They're lots of fun, these twins; but it's no fun to be one of them, after all!"

The Lockwood girls really were in a serious mood when they made their way homeward. It was a tragedy, in their minds, to be separated; and Dora and Dorothy vowed to each other, whatever befell, that Aunt Dora should not discover which girl had been named in her honor.

CHAPTER VII

HIDE AND SEEK

THE Lockwood twins were glad of an excuse—and a good one—for dodging Aunt Dora for one afternoon and evening, and they therefore welcomed the invitation to the strawberry festival at the Sitz farm with acclaim. But there intervened the long Sunday when Aunt Dora nagged them—and everybody else about the cottage—all day.

Mary, the hired girl, who had been with them since she had landed at Ellis Island, and who loved the twins as though they were her own, and admired Mrs. Betsey more than anybody else living, came to the verge of “giving notice” whenever Aunt Dora came into view of the house.

“Sure, I was a bogtrotter when Oi landed, and we *did* kape the pig in the kitchen—I admit it,” declaimed the faithful Mary. “But I’ve been bred to wor’rk under as clane a housekaper as ever wore shoes—God bless her! And to have

that ould ormadoun come here and tell me me flures ar're not clane, and me bedrooms smell musty—— Ah—h! bad 'cess to the loikes av her!”

Mrs. Betsey, to save losing Mary altogether, gave her permission to take Sunday afternoon and evening off. That would free her from the “eagle eye” of Aunt Dora for a few hours, at least.

“Aunt Dora is what old-fashioned people used to call ‘nasty clean’,” grumbled Mr. Lockwood, as he prepared to flee to his beloved plants, despite the sacredness of the day. “She’s so clean that she makes everybody else unhappy about it. But have patience, children. It can’t last forever.”

It was Mrs. Betsey who was put through the “third degree” early in the morning. Couldn’t she really tell the twins apart? Wasn’t there something in their voices dissimilar? Was there not some mark on their bodies by which Dora could be distinguished from Dorothy? Hadn’t one child a scar that the other did not have?

“My dear madam,” declared the old house-keeper and nurse, in desperation. “I gave up the question as hopeless ten years and more ago. If those girls do not wish to own up, nobody can tell them apart, you may be sure of that. Yes,

they *are* stubborn—and they *are* pert. They have never been governed by harshness or by fear. The only way that I know to make Dora tell you which she is, is to make her love you enough to tell you.”

“Nonsense!” snapped Aunt Dora. “They are children. They must obey.”

“In that particular, madam,” said Mrs. Betsey, shaking her head, “I fail to see how you are to make them obey.”

“They both should be punished.”

“Even that would not make them obey you—no matter what the punishment. And you know,” added the old lady, with eyes that began to brighten warningly, “Mr. Lockwood would not hear of the twins being punished.”

“If they were mine I’d spank them both!” declared Aunt Dora, spitefully.

“And that is perhaps one reason why neither wishes to go home with you,” returned Mrs. Betsey, pointedly.

As Mary was gone for the day the twins agreed to get tea; and there being a certain famous recipe, which had been the Lockwood family property for generations, for tea-biscuit, the twins promised Mr. Lockwood he should have them.

“Can’t one of you make the biscuit, without

the other?" demanded Aunt Dora, her gray eyes beginning to sparkle.

"Dora really makes them the best, I believe," said Mrs. Betsey, placidly, stroking the front of her silk gown, as she sat in her low rocker by the front window.

"Ha!" exclaimed the militant lady. "Then let Dora make them."

"Oh, we'll both make 'em," exclaimed one of the twins, getting up with her sister to go to the kitchen. "One of us can sift the flour while the other is preparing the tins. We'll make you a double quantity, Papa," she added, over her shoulder, her own eyes dancing merrily.

"Now! which was *that*?" demanded Aunt Dora. "Was it Dora—or Dorothy?"

"I really couldn't say," murmured Mr. Lockwood.

"Dorothy usually sifts the flour," offered Mrs. Betsey.

"But Dora makes up the biscuit best," said Mr. Lockwood.

Aunt Dora looked from one unruffled face to the other; then she got up quietly and stole from the room. She tiptoed through the hall to the pantry door. There she waited until she was sure the twins were busy at the dresser and stove.

So she stepped into the pantry and pushed aside the white dimity curtain at the window in the door which opened into the kitchen. One twin was busily buttering the tins while the other was sifting the ingredients of the biscuits in the big yellow mixing bowl.

"So Dorothy usually sifts the flour, does she?" muttered the determined old lady, staring hard at the back of the sifter's head.

But one thing Aunt Dora did not know. Every time the girl sifting the flour glanced up from her work she looked straight into a mirror over the dresser, tipped at such an angle that it showed the pantry door. She saw the curtain drawn back and her aunt's nose appear at the window. At once she said to her sister:

"Are you afraid of the wolf at the door?"

"Eh?" jerked out the other twin, looking up quickly.

"But if poor papa is so poor, you know, maybe one of us ought to go home with Aunt Dora."

The girl buttering the tins saw her sister's wink and nod, and glanced slyly in the mirror, too.

"We will fight the wolf at the door and drive it away," she declared, with spirit. "We'll leave school and go to work rather than be separated. Isn't that the way you feel?"

"I should feel that I'd rather work than go home with Auntie, if I were Dora," declared she who was sifting.

"So should I if *I* were Dora," agreed her sister.

A minute later one of the girls, while testing the heat of the oven, screamed.

"Oh, oh!" she cried. "Oh, oh! I'm burned! Look at that!" and she held up her wrist with a white mark across it.

Her sister darted across the kitchen, crying: "I'll get the witch hazel—you poor dear!"

She had forgotten Aunt Dora, hiding in the pantry, and she collided with her with considerable force.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the exasperated old lady.

"Nothing with me," returned the hurrying girl. "It's *she* who's burned."

"Who's burned?" cried Aunt Dora. "Which of you is hurt?"

The girl who had stopped recovered her self-possession. "Let me go, Auntie," she said, quietly. "*My sister* has burned her wrist."

And so the anxious and determined aunt did not catch the twins off their guard, neither in war nor peace.

CHAPTER IX

ONE IS A HEROINE

WHEN the girls invited to Evangeline Sitz's "party" hurried out of Central High on Monday afternoon, they found, as Laura Belding had promised, her father's automobile, as well as one of Mr. Purcell's big, three-seated "lumber barges," as the boys called Centerport's sight-seeing autos. There were three seats behind the driver's, each wide enough for four persons.

Laura and Chet (the latter of whom drove the Belding machine) had their own close friends in the smaller auto, and it was well filled. Mr. Purcell stood by the chauffeur of the big car as the Lockwood twins whisked into the front seat, completely filling it. Dora and Dorothy always preferred to keep together, and nobody could get between them here.

The girls heard the automobile owner ask the driver:

"How do you feel now, Bennie? All right?"

"Pretty good, Boss," said the man, who, the twins noticed, was pale.

"Sure you can make it all right? If you feel bad, say so, and I'll take your place."

"I'll be all right, Boss, once we get moving," said the chauffeur.

"Oh, look who's here!" whispered Dorothy, suddenly, to her sister, pinching her arm to attract her attention.

"It's Pretty!" gasped Dora. "Isn't he a vision of loveliness?"

The dandy of the school came mincing along the sidewalk with the evident intention of joining the auto party. He had been excused from classes early to go home and "rig up" for the occasion; and he certainly was—as Lance Darby said from the head automobile—"a sight for gods and men!"

Prettyman Sweet wore a white flannel coat and trousers, with a very fine line of blue running through the goods lengthwise. He wore a canvas hat and canvas shoes, cut low to show open-work crimson silk socks—oh, they were dreams of the hosier's art! He wore a flowing crimson tie, too, and around his waist, instead of an ordinary belt, he wore a new-fangled, knitted, crimson sash-belt, the like of which none of the boys of Central High had ever beheld before.

"Oh, Purt! where did you get it?" cried Lance Darby.

"You're fixed up to flag a freight, with all that red on you," said Chet.

"And where *did* you get that gorgeous sash, Mr. Sweet?" demanded "Bobby" Hargrew, who was a tease by nature, and had the sharpest tongue of any girl at Central High.

"Oh, now, Miss Clara," said Purt Sweet, carefully climbing into the seat directly behind the twins. "This is the very latest thing—weally! I sent clear to New York for it. You see, it's not so stiff and hard looking as a leather belt. This—er—lends a softness to the whole costume that is—er—quite unobtainable with a belt."

"Oh, gee!" gasped Bobby. "It's soft enough, all right, all right!" and the rest laughed as they piled into the machine.

Purt sat with his back to the twins, and was explaining to the girl beside him that he did not mind riding backward at all. Bobby was still on the ground, and as Dora and Dorothy looked down at her they saw the mischievous one suddenly reach up her thumb and finger and pick at a little frayed place upon the edge of Purt's beautiful sash.

The thing was knitted loosely of some kind of mercerized cotton, and when Bobby seized the end of a broken strand the sash began to unravel with marvelous rapidity. She grinned up at the

twins delightedly, and continued to pull on the thread.

"All aboard, young folks!" cried Mr. Purcell. "You ready forward, there, Mr. Chetwood?"

"All right," returned Chet, tripping his self-starter.

Mr. Purcell stooped to crank up his big machine. Bobby, her eyes dancing, also stooped beside the front wheel for a moment, and then whisked into her seat, facing Purt Sweet. But the twins saw what she had done. She had fastened the end of the crimson thread to the head of a bolt upon the wheel-box.

"All right, Bennie!" said Mr. Purcell, stepping back and waving his hand. The big machine began to tremble and shake, and then they pulled out behind the Belding car. There was a lot of noise, and laughter, and fun; but nobody seemed so hilarious as Clara Hargrew and the Lockwood twins.

"Can't you keep your eyes off Purt, Bobby?" demanded the girl sitting next to the Sweet boy. "What's the matter with him?"

"No—nothing!" chortled Bobby, stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth.

But she was watching that red thread shooting down to the wheel and winding around and around the box, faster and faster as the big

machine got under way. By the time the auto turned into Market Street a great ball of the red worsted, or whatever it was, had formed on the inside of the wheel, and the perfectly unconscious Prettyman Sweet was fast losing his beautiful crimson sash.

The knitted part of the sash overlaid a belt of canvas which really did the service of holding up the exquisite's trousers. But fast, fast indeed, the red thread was running out.

Others saw the unraveling yarn, and joined Bobby and the twins in hilarious laughter. Then a man walking on the sidewalk espied the growing ball of thread on the wheel and followed the strand to its source. His happy chortles attracted the attention of other pedestrians, and soon the big automobile was being accompanied by a chorus of shouts from small boys in the streets, and laughter from an ever-increasing number of bystanders.

"What do you suppose is the matter with all these people?" demanded the unconscious Purt. "I never did see the like. Weally! It's too widiculous."

"That's what it is!" laughed Bobby.

"Why!" exclaimed Purt, "they weally seem to see something about us to laugh at! What can it be?"

"Must be you, Purt," said one of the boys.

"Widiculous! There is nothing about me to laugh at, dear boy."

"Huh!" grunted his schoolmate. "You're one big laugh all the time, Pretty, only you don't know it!"

The way to the farm where the young people were bound was out Market Street to the east, and then through the winding road which bisected Robinson's Woods and up into the hills. Mr. Sitz was a Swiss, and had been used to hilly farms in his youth; therefore the "up hill and down dale" nature of his farming land near Centerport did not trouble him in the least. He and Otto, his son, and the hands he hired, made good crops upon the hilly farm, and the Sitzes were becoming well to do.

In the front auto Laura was speaking about Eve Sitz.

"She's such a big, muscular girl. If she comes to Central High next fall, as I want her to, she'll help us greatly in athletics. You see, she'll enter as a junior, and be in our classes. And she can pull an oar already—and what a fine guard she'd make at basket-ball! She's a lot lighter on her feet than Hester Grimes, or Mary O'Rourke, in spite of the fact that she's so big."

"Bully!" exclaimed Jess. "She can cut out Hessie, then."

Suddenly Lance, who looked back, raised a shout of surprise and terror.

"Look at that! What's happened to the other car! Stop, Chet!"

The young folks in the Belding car sprang up and looked back. They were just in time to see the man who drove the sight-seeing car fall sidewise from his seat, and slip down until half of his body lay upon the step. He had dropped the wheel and the heavy car was running wild.

The two cars were out of the city now, and running upon a lonely bit of road. The Belding car was, indeed, half way down the long slope, which the heavier one had just begun to descend. The big auto began to wobble from side to side, and those ahead saw one of the Lockwood twins seize the man who had fallen and drag him back into the car. But, meanwhile, the car itself was running away.

Faster and faster it rolled down the hill, and its course was so erratic that those in the first car almost held their breath. The expectation was that the big car would collide with a telegraph pole beside the road, or go into the ditch on the other side.

"Stop, Chet!" yelled Lance again.

But if Chet Belding stopped his car, he knew that the other might run them down. He dared not run that risk.

"Grab the wheel! Shut off the power! Brake her!" yelled Lance, wildly waving his arms at the crowd behind. "Some of you fellows do something!"

But the boy nearest to the steering gear of the big machine was Purt Sweet—and Purt scarcely knew enough about an automobile to keep from being run over by one!

"Oh!" cried Laura, "they will be hurt! There! it's going to smash into that tree——"

But suddenly they saw one of the twins dive into the chauffeur's seat. She seized the wheel and guided the big machine into the straight road again. Then she manipulated the levers and quickly brought the shuddering car to a stop. The driver still lay motionless.

"Oh, oh!" cried Jess, hopping out of the Belding car when Chet stopped it, and running back. "She stopped it! You're a real heroine—Dorothy—Dora—whichever one you are."

But the Lockwood twins looked at each other quickly and that understanding glance made the girl who had played the heroine say:

"It doesn't matter which one of us did it, Jess. We'll divide the heroic act between us. But let's see what's the matter with this poor man; he's fainted, I believe."

CHAPTER X

BAKED IN A BISCUIT

THERE wasn't a house in sight; but not far beyond was the inn at Robinson's Woods, the picnic grounds, and Lance took the management of the big car while the unconscious chauffeur was rushed ahead by Chet in the Belding car. The man was put to bed at the inn and a physician sent for; but Lance agreed to drive the big car himself on to the Sitz place.

When the larger car reached the inn, however, another discovery was made. Even while the auto had followed its erratic course, untended, part way down the hill, Purt Sweet had sat tight and merely squealed. He had not offered to leave his seat.

But now, by the merest chance, he happened to look down at his waist. The greater part of that beautiful crimson sash had disappeared!

"Wha—wha—what's the matter with me?" gasped Purt. "I—I've lost it! Who's taken it?"

He bobbed up suddenly and broke the strand that had been, all this time, winding around and around the wheelbox until there was now a big roll of it.

"What's the matter with you, Purt?" demanded one of the boys, bursting with laughter.

"Why—why—somebody's stolen my sash!" wailed the youth. "Did you see it? Isn't that a mean trick, now?"

The shout that went up from the girls and boys who had been watching the unraveling process brought the crowd from the first automobile back, too. Poor Purt looked ruefully at his lost sash, wound around the wheel, and bemoaned his bad fortune most feelingly. But Lance cut off the ball of red worsted and threw it in the gutter.

"I really wish you wouldn't be so careless, Purt," he said, as though the victim were at fault. "Mussing up the whole machine with your fancy fixin's. Don't you do that any more."

"But, my dear boy, I had no idea of doing it—weally!" exclaimed the unfortunate Purt. "I don't for the life of me see how that could have become attached to that wheel."

And as nobody explained the mystery to him, he was in low spirits all the rest of the way to the farmhouse.

But the preparations at the Sitz farm were

likely to raise the spirits of any boy or girl. In the first place the farmhouse was a very pleasant old house indeed, and its big grassy yard, with shade trees and vines, was a delightful spot for an open-air party. Under the grape arbors, now in full leaf, long tables had been spread, and as soon as the automobiles arrived Eve called the girls to the back porch to help hull berries already picked, while Otto, her rather slow-witted brother, took the boys down to the strawberry patch to help pick more of the fruit.

Purt, who was greedy as could be, "picked into his mouth" until Chet and the other boys warned him that he'd be so full he would not be able to do justice to the berries and cream that would come later.

The big kitchen of the farmhouse was a scene of great activity, too. Mother Sitz, who could scarcely speak a word of English, was happy in having the girls about, however; and she had made and frosted and decorated innumerable little cakes such as she had been used to in the old country. Eve put on a big apron and lent Laura one, and the two set about making the biscuit and the old-fashioned dough for the short-cakes.

Laura Belding was fond of Eve for the country girl's own sake; but loyalty to Central High and Laura's deep interest in school athletics

caused her to cultivate the girl, too. There was a very good district school which Eve had attended, in which the teacher had brought her older scholars along to a point that enabled them to take the examinations for the Junior grade of the city schools. These examinations were to be held in Centerport within a fortnight, and Laura wished Eve to come to Central High in the Fall, instead of to the Keyport High, which was somewhat nearer to the Sitz place.

"You'll have to take train to Keyport, anyway, Eve," urged her friend, while they were busy making the biscuits. "There is a better train stops at your station, bound for Centerport; and you can get out at the Hill Station and then it is only a five-minute walk to our school."

"I know, Laura," said the big girl. "But do you suppose I can pass?"

"Why not?"

"They say that Mr. Sharp is dreadfully *sharp* on Latin, and that's my weak point."

"Why, you can cram on Latin in a fortnight. I'll tell you a book to get that will help—and it costs but fifty cents. You can begin right away on it——"

"But I haven't got the book yet,"

"You've got the fifty cents, haven't you?" returned her friend.

"Yes."

"Then—what time does your rural delivery man go by the end of the road?"

Eve glanced at the big clock solemnly ticking on the wall.

"In about three-quarters of an hour."

"Run and write your letter to the Keyport bookseller. One of the boys will run out and give the letter to the mail carrier."

"But a fifty cent piece won't be safe in a letter," said Eve, doubtfully.

"We —ell——"

"And I haven't time to run out there and stop Mr. Cheever, and make out a money order—for fifty cents, too!" exclaimed Eve.

"Humph!" ejaculated Laura. "There's fifty ways of sending fifty cents——"

"Sure," laughed Eve. "A penny at a time!"

"No. I'm not joking. Write your letter. Give me the fifty cents. I'll find a safe way. Give me the half dollar now. I'll put the biscuits in the pans. Is the oven hot?"

"Pretty near."

"I'll try it—with one biscuit, anyway," chuckled Laura, seizing the half dollar her friend gave out of her purse.

In ten minutes Eve came dancing back from her room with the letter written.

"How you going to send the money, Laura?"

she demanded. "Here's the letter—all ready."

"And the money will be ready in a minute or two. That oven's good and hot," said Laura.

"What do you mean?" gasped Eve. "You're not baking the half dollar?"

"Yes, ma'am," laughed Laura. "That's what I'm doing."

She dropped the range door and showed a small pan with one lonesome little biscuit in it.

"It's baking fine, too. I want it to be a hard, crusty one——"

"And you've baked the half dollar in the biscuit!" screamed Eve.

"That's what I've done. You just add a line to your letter to that effect. Then we'll put the letter and biscuit in that little box, tie it up, address it, and Lance Darby will run out to the road and mail it for you. Be quick now," concluded Laura, whisking the pan out of the oven, "for the half-dollar biscuit is done!"

"What an original girl you are, Laura," said Eve, doing as she was bid. "Who'd have thought of *that* way to send coin in the mail?"

"Your Aunt Laura thought of it," laughed her friend. "For we want nothing to stand in your way of passing that examination, Eve. We need you at Central High."

CHAPTER XI

THE BOAT IS FOUND

AND that supper! It was something to be remembered by the crowd from town. Such thick, luscious yellow cream that Mother Sitz lifted from the pans of milk in the cement block "milk-house" most of the town-bred folk had never seen before. The biscuits and "short-cake" came out of the oven with just the right brown to them. The big berries were heaped upon the wedges of buttered short-cake, and then cream poured over the berries, with plenty of sugar.

"Yum! Yum!" mumbled Lance Darby, with a huge mouthful obstructing his parts of speech. "Isn't this the Jim-dandiest lay-out you ever saw, Chet?"

"I never sat down to a better one," admitted his chum. "But please don't talk to me. Purt is getting more of the berries than I am—and he isn't talking at all. Just pass the sugar, Lance, and then shut up for a while."

But there was enough serious talk during the

supper to arrange a return treat for Eve and Otto Sitz. The farmer boy and his sister had seldom been on Lake Luna and Laura and her brother suggested a trip by boat and canoe to Cavern Island for the following Saturday.

"And no picnic luncheon at the park. That's too common," declared Jess Morse, eagerly. "Let's do something different."

"Trot out your 'different' suggestion, Josephine," said her chum.

"Let's go to the caves. Let's picnic there."

"Oh!" cried one of the Lockwood twins.

"That's where we saw the 'lone pirate.'"

"The lone *what*?" rejoined Nellie Agnew.

"What do you mean by that?"

The other twin explained how and when they had seen the bushy-headed, wild-looking man at the foot of Boulder Head.

"There's where the caverns open onto the shore, exactly," remarked Chet Belding. "Are you afraid of meeting the pirate, girls?"

"We'll capture him and make him walk the plank!" declared Bobby Hargrew. "Hurrah for the pirate!"

So the trip to Cavern Island for the next Saturday was arranged, Eve and Otto promising to join the party at Centerport. And the run home by automobile in the moonlight was enlivened by

plans for the coming good time on the Lake.

Lance ran the sight-seeing automobile carefully and delivered it to Mr. Purcell, the owner, in good season. The man who should have driven it, but who was taken ill, had been removed to the hospital from the inn in the woods.

"I understand one of those girls played the heroine and stopped the car," said the automobile owner.

"Yes, sir," replied Lance. "That was one of the Lockwood twins."

"Which one was it? I'd like to thank her, at least," said Mr. Purcell.

"Couldn't tell you," laughed Lance.

"Why couldn't you? Sworn to secrecy, young man?" demanded Mr. Purcell.

"No, sir. But the twins themselves seem to be. Nobody knows them apart, and they won't tell on each other. One of them is the heroine, but which one nobody knows," and Lance Darby went off laughing.

Meanwhile the twins themselves walked briskly home from the schoolhouse where the party of young folk had separated. On the way they met a girl a little older than themselves, hurrying in the opposite direction.

"Here's Billy Long's sister, Alice," whispered Dora to Dorothy.

"Oh, dear me!" replied Dorothy. "I suppose she has had to work late at the paper box factory. And how she must feel——"

Her twin seized the factory girl's arm as she was hurrying past with just a little nod to the Lockwood twins.

"Alice Long!" ejaculated Dora. "You're crying. What's the matter?"

"Oh, girls! you know about Billy, don't you?" cried Short and Long's sister.

"They haven't caught him?" cried Dorothy.

"No, no! I almost wish they would," sobbed Alice Long. "We don't know where he is. I've just been down to Mr. Norman's to see if the boat has been found."

"And it hasn't?" demanded one of the twins.

"No. It was an old boat that Mr. Norman thought he was going fishing in, same as usual. Billy often brings home a mess of fish, or sells them. You know, he has always been a helpful boy."

"We want to tell you, Alice dear," said Dorothy with a glance at her sister, "that we don't believe a word of what they say about Billy."

"Thank you, Miss," said Alice, eagerly. "I was sure his schoolmates would stand by him. But he was very foolish to run away—if he has run away."

"Otherwise, what has happened to him?"

"That is what is worrying father and me. The boat was old. Something might have happened. He might be drowned," sobbed the sister.

"Oh, no, Alice! Billy was a good swimmer."

"I know that. But often good swimmers are taken with cramps. And if the boat overturned, or sank, out in the middle of Lake Luna——"

"That's too dreadful a thing to think of!" cried Dora. "I believe he ran away because he was afraid of being arrested. Everybody was talking about his having a hand in that robbery."

"Well, he never did it. I could testify that he wasn't out of his bed Tuesday night when the robbery took place. I told the policemen so. But, of course, Billy could have gone out of the window and down the shed roof—and got back again, too—without our knowing it. He has more than once, I suppose," admitted the troubled sister.

"You see, on Wednesday Stresch & Potter sent their store detective to see Billy, and he bulldozed him and threatened him. I expect the boy was badly frightened, although the man was only a cheap bully. So we don't know what to think—whether Billy has deliberately run away, or that some accident happened to him on the lake."

"Chet and Lance Darby were looking for him

Saturday over at Cavern Island," said a twin. "But they met with an accident. We're all going over to the island again this coming Saturday, and we'll search the east end for him."

"How would he live over there?" gasped his sister.

"Oh, there are berries this time of year. And of course, he could fish," said Dora eagerly.

"There's a man hiding there, anyway," added Dorothy, but then remembered that the information might add to Alice's fright, so said no more.

"We'll do everything we can to find Short and Long," Dora assured the boy's sister. "And we are telling everybody that we don't believe Billy would do such a thing as they say. As though there wasn't any other boy in Centerport who could have crawled through that window at Stresch & Potter's."

The twins parted from Alice Long, and ran home. They slipped to bed without encountering Aunt Dora and counted that day well spent because the old lady had not yet caught them so that she could identify Dora.

But on Tuesday Aunt Dora appeared at Central High and met Miss Grace G. Carrington—otherwise "Gee Gee."

"I wish to hear my nieces recite," she said, with sharply twinkling eyes behind her glasses.

"It doesn't matter what class—any class will do."

Miss Carrington politely asked the prim old lady to sit beside her on the platform, and Aunt Dora listened to the recitation then in progress. Both Dora and Dorothy took part; but for the life of her the near-sighted lady could not tell when Dora spoke, and when Dorothy answered!

"I suppose you know them apart?" she ventured, to Miss Carrington.

"Oh, no; but I believe they usually answer to their names. They stand about alike in their classes and we have put them on their honor not to answer for each other. They are good girls and give me little trouble," added Gee Gee, which was a concession from her.

"So if you called one of them to the desk you could not be sure that the one you called really came?" asked Aunt Dora.

"Not as far as physical appearances go," said Gee Gee, shaking her head.

So Aunt Dora was thwarted again and went back to the cottage to invent some other method of tripping the twins. It had become a game, now, that both sides were determined to win; and Mr. Lockwood and Mrs. Betsey stood by and watched the play with amusement.

A veritable fleet of canoes, pair-oared and four-oared boats gathered at Central High boat

house, just before noon the next Saturday. It was a bright and calm day and the lake looked most inviting.

The girls were in fine fettle, particularly. The subscription paper to raise the sum necessary for the purchase of a new eight-oared shell had gone about town briskly that week and Laura reported that already more than half of the sum necessary had been promised. She had written to the builders of such shells and they had replied that there was one in stock that they would be glad to send the girls of Central High, on approval, if the physical instructor agreed.

"And Mrs. Case is writing to them to-day," concluded Laura. "They will send on the new boat and we can pay for it after the money is all in. And, oh, girls! We'll win that race from the Keyport and other crews, if such a thing is possible. After to-day the crew will be in training. We must try out the boat, and work in her just as soon as she arrives, and every other afternoon thereafter. So, you members of the crew make your preparations accordingly."

"And for goodness sake, Bobby," urged Nellie Agnew, to the little "cox" of the crew, "don't you go to cutting capers in school so that Gee Gee can condition you. She's just waiting for a chance to fix it so you cannot steer for us."

"Aw, pshaw!" said Clara Hargrew. "I don't do anything."

"No; but Gee Gee does something to you," declared Jess Morse, laughing.

"See that you don't give her a chance to stop your after-hour athletics again, Bobby," begged Laura.

"All right; I'll be good," said Bobby, grinning.

"But after school—well, when long vacation comes this time I think I'll have to set the old school house afire to celebrate!"

"No. You had trouble over fires before," advised Dorothy Lockwood.

"That's so," agreed Dora.

"Don't mention fire again!" exclaimed Jess. "That's why we lost the race before—because you could not steer for us, Bobby."

Laura and Lance Darby took Eve and Otto Sitz with them in Lance's nice boat. There were two pairs of sculls and Otto managed to row very well in the bow. Of course Chet took Jess in his boat, and the remainder paired off as fancy beckoned. But the twins paddled their cedar canoe.

And few of the fleet of small craft were propelled to the island in better shape than Dora's and Dorothy's canoe. The others cheered the pretty girls as they forced their craft through the rippling water. The management of a canoe

—especially a double canoe—is not so easy as it appears. But the Lockwood twins had taken to that form of aquatic sports very kindly, and there really were few canoe crews in Centerport who handled their craft as well.

The fleet of boats crossed the lake in a short time and, headed by the twins' canoe, reached the eastern end of the island. They swept into the cove where the girls had seen, the previous Saturday, the rough-looking, bewhiskered man upon the shore. Right here under the Boulder Head was the mouth of the cavern from which the island obtained its name.

As the twins swept their canoe on with easy strokes, Dora suddenly uttered a cry of excitement.

"See there, Dory!" she said.

"See where?" demanded her sister, craning her neck to see over Dora's shoulder.

"There! Down in the water! The sunken boat!"

The water in the cove was very clear, but it had considerable depth. The canoe was brought sharply up by the two girls and both peered down.

Below them could plainly be seen a sunken rowboat. It did not appear to be damaged in any way, but had simply filled and sunk.

"What have you found, girls?" demanded

Lance Darby, whose boat was nearest to the twins' canoe at the moment. "Is there some deep sea monster down there?"

"Come and look, Lance," cried Dora.

The moment the young Darby saw the submerged craft he exclaimed:

"Here it is, by gracious!"

"Here is what?" demanded Laura.

"The boat. Hey, Chet! we've found it!" he called to his chum, who quickly turned his own boat's prow in their direction.

"What you found?" demanded Laura's brother, coming nearer.

"Here's Mr. Norman's boat that he lent Short and Long," declared Lance, eagerly. "It was just as you said, Chet. Billy came over here to the island."

"Oh, my!" cried Jess. "And if that is so, perhaps he is still here."

"We must find him," said one of the twins, earnestly. "His sister Alice is just about worried to death about him; and the longer he remains in hiding, the worse it will be for him, anyway."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE CAVE

THE other boats of the flotilla began to make the cove and soon there was a loudly chattering crowd around the sunken boat.

"Are you sure that's the old rowboat Billy got from Mr. Norman?" asked one of the other boys of Chet.

"Yes, sir! I've been out in it more than once with Short and Long," declared Laura's brother.

"But where can Billy be?" cried Josephine Morse.

"Surely, the poor fellow isn't drowned?" queried Nellie Agnew.

"Oh, don't suggest such a thing!" returned one of the twins. "If you'd seen how badly his sister felt about his absence——"

"I expect the Longs are all broken up about it. And they have no mother," said Laura Belding, softly.

"And Billy could swim like a fish," quoth Lance Darby.

"No chance of his being drowned," declared Chet.

"But, do you suppose he sank the boat here to hide it—sank it purposely?" cried another girl. "Maybe he's hiding here. Why don't they search the island for him?"

"And the caves?" cried another.

"*I'd* like to get hold of him," Chetwood Belding said, gravely. "But Billy never in this world crawled through that basement window and opened the door for those burglars. I'll never believe it——"

"Not even if Billy said so himself, dear boy?" interposed Prettyman Sweet.

"I'd doubt it then," rejoined Chet, grimly. "And let me tell you fellows, this absence of Short and Long is a very bad thing for Central High. We lost the game with Lumberport just because Billy wasn't at short; you all know that. I'm mighty glad the game with West High was called off for to-day. Without Billy Long, Central High is very likely to win the booby prize on the diamond this season."

"Right you are, Chet," declared Lance Darby.

"I admit Billy is some little ball player," agreed another boy. "But it looks bad, his running away."

"What would *you* have done?" flashed out

Dora Lockwood, for the twins had become strong partisans of the absent Billy since talking with Alice Long, "if that store detective had come and bullied *you*?"

"Put him through the third degree, did he?"

"Yes. And scared him by all sorts of threats. And then, everybody around the neighborhood got hold of it, and said that Billy was just the boy to do such a thing," Dorothy broke in.

"He *was* up to all sorts of mischief," Nellie Agnew observed.

"Never did a mean thing in his life, Billy didn't," declared Chet.

"Come on ashore," said Lance, he and Otto Sitz pulling their heavy boat in to a sloping landing. "No use gassing here about that old boat. We can't raise it. But I'll tell Mr. Norman where it is when I go back."

"You're very right, Lance," said Purt Sweet. "It's time to have the luncheon—don't you think? I'm getting howwibly hungry, dontcher know?"

"To see you eat strawberries up at Eve's house last Monday, I thought you would never be hungry again—if you recovered," laughed Jess.

"Aw—now—Miss Josephine—weally, you know," gasped the dude. "You are too, too cwuel!"

"Somebody throw that fellow overboard!"

growled Chet. "He's getting softer and softer every day."

"Never mind," whispered his sister, laughing, "he is dressed much less gaudily to-day. What Bobby did to that sash of his last Monday seems to have made Purt less vociferous in his sartorial taste."

"Gee, Laura!" cried Bobby Hargrew, from the next boat, "if Mammy Jinny heard that, she sure would think that schools ought to teach only 'words of one syllabub.'"

"Never mind Mammy Jinny," laughed Laura. "We've got some of Mammy's finest efforts in pie and cake in our hamper. And I admit, like Purt, I am hungry myself. Let's eat before we do another living thing!"

That was indeed a hilarious picnic. The girls had brought paper napkins and tablecloths, as well as plenty of paper plates. No trouble about washing dishes, or packing them home again, afterward. Chet had bought a big tin pail and in this he made gallons of lemonade, and everybody ate and drank to repletion.

"Now, if we were only at the park for just a little while, and could top off on ice cream," said Lance, lying back on the greensward with a contented sigh despite his spoken wish.

"I'd rather see that monkey again," laughed Jess. "That's the cutest little beast."

"It weally is surprising how much the cweature knows," said Purt Sweet. "It is weally almost human."

"So are you!" scoffed Lance. "It's an ugly little animal. Never did like a monkey. And I think Tony Allegretto and his trained monkey are fakes. We didn't see him do anything wonderful."

"Oh, they say that the monkey does lots of other tricks when Tony gets a big crowd into his booth," said Laura.

"Now, who's for seeing the caves?" cried Chet, rising briskly. "You girls declared you wanted to go 'way through the hill."

"Won't we get lost?" asked Nellie, timidly.

"Not a bit of it. It's a straight passage—nearly," said Chet. "Lance and I have been through a couple of times. We come out into just the prettiest little valley in the middle of the island—and not far from the park, at that."

"But people *have* been lost in the caves," objected one girl.

"Not of late years. There are side passages, I know, where a fellow could get turned around."

"It's just like a maze, over at the east end," Lance observed. "But we won't go into that part."

"And the way is marked along the walls of the straight cave in red paint. I've got a box

of tapers," said Chet, and ran to the boat for them.

"Gas lighters," said Dorothy.

"Oh, Jolly!" ejaculated Bobby Hargrew. "You know what that new hired girl of ours said when mother showed her how to cook macaroni? She says:

"'Sure, Mrs. Hargrew, do youse be atein' them things?'

"And when mother told her yes, Bridget said:

"'Well! well! Where I wor'ked last they used 'em to light the gas wid!'"

The party of young folk had to follow a narrow path along the shore of the cove for some distance ere they came to the first opening into the caves. The sheer face of Boulder Head rose more than a hundred feet above their heads. There were shelves and crevices in the rock, out of which stunted trees and bushes grew in abundance; but there was no practicable path to the top of the cliff.

"They say that, years ago, a man used to live on this island who could climb that cliff like a goat," Chet said.

"Bet none of you boys could climb it," cried Bobby Hargrew.

"And we're not going to try it, Miss! Not on a double-dare," laughed Chet. "We'll go

through it, if you please. Now, here's the opening of the main passage. You see, there's an arrow in red painted on the rock just inside."

"It looks awfully dark," said Nellie, quaveringly.

"And suppose the 'lone pirate' should be hiding in there?" whispered Dora to her twin.

"We—ell! I guess there are enough of us to frighten him away," said Dorothy.

Chet took the lead with a lighted taper. Of course, when he was well inside the small flame gave a very pale glow; but those behind could see it. Then Lance followed with another light at about the middle of the Indian file, and Otto Sitz brought up the rear with a third.

"You look out somebody doesn't creep up behind you and bite, Otto," laughed Bobby Hargrew, who was just ahead of the Swiss boy.

"Dat don't worry me von bit," growled Otto. "It iss only ha'ants I am afraid of, and ha'nts don't live in caves."

"No," said Bobby, shivering. "B—r—r—r! they'd freeze to death in here. Isn't it cold, after coming out of the warm sun?"

But when they were once well into the passage through the rock, and the first 'shivery' feeling had worn off, the girls as well as the boys were hilarious. When they shouted in the high and

vaulted chambers their voices were echoed thunderously in their ears. The flaming tapers were reflected in places from many points of quartz, or mica. The floor of the cavern was quite smooth, and rose only a little. In places the walls were worn as smooth as glass. In some dim, past age the center of this island must have been a great lake, and the water had found an outlet through these passages.

At one point they found a little circular chamber at one side, in which was a bed of pine branches. It really looked as though the place had been used—and not so long before—as a camp. There were the ashes of a fire on the floor.

“Here’s where the pirate has been living,” Dora declared to her sister. “It would scare the girls into fits if we should tell them so.”

“Hush!” said Dorothy. “Perhaps that man *is* here somewhere,” and she, at least, was glad to hurry on, although Chet searched the chamber with particular care.

“What do you expect to find here, old man?” asked Lance, laughing.

But his chum only shook his head and led the way toward the distant outlet of the passage.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGE MAN AGAIN

THEY came out of the cave into a hollow, grown to a wilderness of small trees, yet carpeted between with a brilliant sod of short grass. On the steep sides were larger trees; but evidently, at a time not then long past, the cup of the hollow had been cleared. And at one side was the ruin of a log hut.

"The man who lived alone at this end of the island, and climbed up and down Boulder Head, used to occupy this hut," said Chet.

"But those logs were cut a hundred years ago!" cried Dora Lockwood. "See how they have rotted at the ends."

"I guess that's so. Nobody knows who built the cabin."

"Indians!" cried Jess.

"Indians didn't built log houses. The first settlers did that. Indians lived in wigwams," declared Laura.

"Some old hunter lived here, maybe, when the

woods were full of bears and wildcats," suggested her chum.

"What's that!" suddenly shrieked Bobby. "There's a wildcat, now!"

"Behave!" commanded Laura, shaking the smaller girl. "You can't scare us that way."

"Nothing more ferocious inhabits these woods than a Teddy-bear," laughed Jess Morse.

"Then it was a Teddy bear I saw in that tree," declared Bobby, pointing. "And it was a live one."

The girls—some of them, at least—drew together. "What did you see, Clara?" demanded Nellie Agnew.

"A little brown animal——"

"A red squirrel!" cried Lance.

"Hark!" cried Chet. "I hear him."

There certainly did come to their ears a chattering sound.

"That's no squirrel," announced Otto. "I haf been hunting enough for them alretty."

"No squirrel was ever so noisy as that, Chet," said his sister.

"There! I see it again," cried the quick-eyed Bobby.

"My goodness, gracious me!" gasped Purt, who was craning his neck to see into the tree tops so that the back of his high collar sawed

his neck. "I—I thought it looked like a blue-jay."

"Say!" exclaimed Lance. "You're looking in the wrong direction."

"It's a monkey!" cried Dora Lockwood, at that moment.

"It's Tony Allegretto's monkey," added her twin.

Some of the others caught sight of the animal then. It was truly the large monkey the friends had seen only the week before at the amusement park at the other end of the island.

"He's run away!" cried Laura.

"I hope he has," Dorothy Lockwood said. "That Italian didn't treat him kindly. What was his name?"

"He called the monk 'Bébé'," said Lance.

"Let's see if he will come down to us," suggested Laura, crossing the hollow.

"Now, keep back, the rest of you," commanded Lance. "If anybody can get the little beast, Laura can do it."

"Sure!" chuckled Bobby. "Mother Wit can charm either boys, or monkeys—and right out of the trees!"

But they gave way to Mother Wit and she went alone to the foot of the tree in which Bébé was swinging. He chattered when she came near,

and swung upright on the branch. But he did not appear to be much afraid.

Laura found an apple in her pocket, and she offered it to the monkey, calling to him soothingly. Whether his monkeyship was fond of apples, or not, he was curious, and he began to descend the tree slowly.

He was dressed in a part of his odd Neapolitan suit; but it was torn and bedraggled. A cord was fastened to his collar, but it had become frayed and so was broken. His queer, ugly face was wrinkled into an expression of doubt as he approached Laura, and his little eyes snapped greedily. The apple tempted him.

"Come down, Béb ," coaxed Laura.

"Talk Italian to him—he understands that better," giggled Jess.

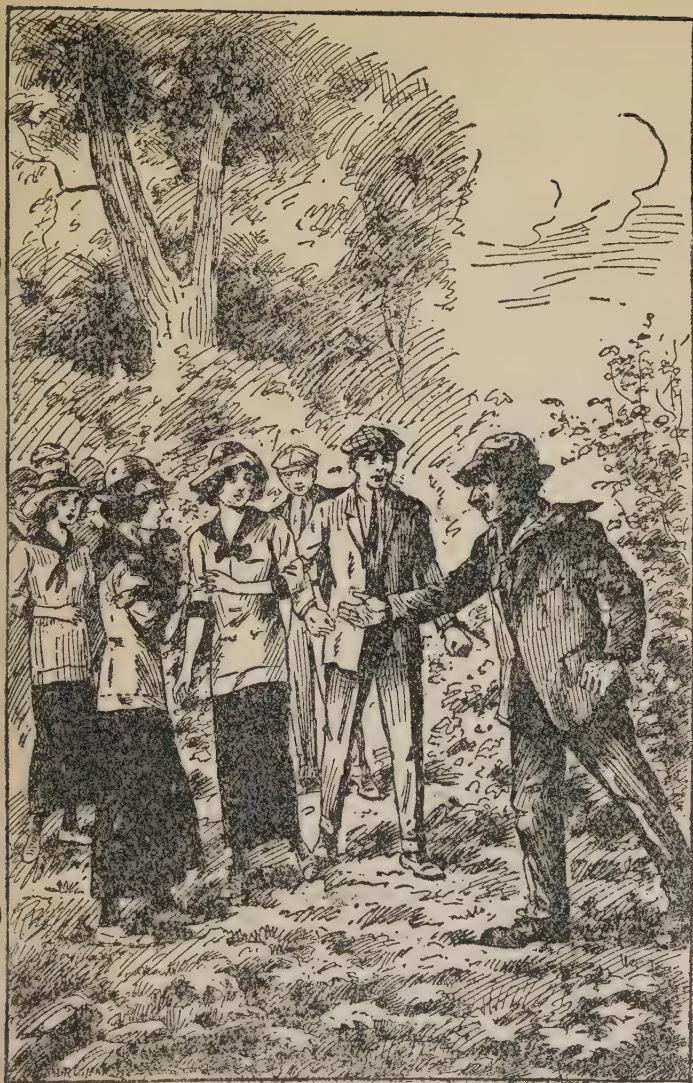
Béb  chattered angrily.

"Hush!" commanded Lance. "She'll get him yet, if you'll let her alone."

The monkey did seem, when all was quiet, to be about to leap into Laura's arms.

"Come, Béb ," she coaxed, and finally the chattering creature timidly dropped from the branch of the tree and snuggled down into her arms, grabbing the apple on the instant and sinking his sharp teeth into it.

At the very moment of her success there were crashing footsteps in the bushes and into the



"AH-AH!" CRIED THE ITALIAN, "YOU TRY-A TO STEAL-A
DA MONK!"

Girls of Central High on Lake Luna.

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opening rushed Tony Allegretto, the monkey's master.

"Ah-ah!" cried the Italian, his face glowing and his black eyes snapping. "You try-a to steal-a da monk! Come to me Bébé—or I break-a da neck!"

He rushed toward the girl holding the monkey. The animal chattered angrily and cowered in Laura's arms.

"Hold on," said Chet, stepping forward. "Nobody's stealing your monkey, and don't you say we are. He was up the tree there and my sister got him down for you. I reckon if you treated him half decently he wouldn't run away from you."

"You! Ha!" sputtered Tony. "You one o' dem fresh boys, eh? Give-a me da monk!"

"Let him have the creature, Laura," said Chet.

"He'll beat him. See how frightened poor Bébé is!"

"Can't help it," said her brother. "He belongs to the dago——"

"Calla me da dago, too!" stammered the angry Italian. "I fix-a you for dis!" and he shook his fist at Chet.

"Come on and do your fixing right now," advised the big boy, easily. "You won't find me as easy as Bébé, I bet you!"

"You 'Merican boys and girls want to steal

my monk—want-a spoil-a da act!” cried Tony. He grabbed Bébé out of Laura’s arms, although the monkey shrieked his protest at the exchange. But Tony did not beat the little beast, and it clung to him with one arm around Tony’s neck while it finished the apple.

“You ought to thank us for finding your monkey for you,” said Lance Darby, in disgust.

Tony growled something in Italian and started off up the side of the hollow. Before he got out of sight he was joined by a man who stepped out of hiding in a clump of brush.

“Did you see that?” cried Lance, eagerly, in Chet’s ear. “There’s another of ’em here.”

“Another monkey?” laughed Chet.

But Dora whispered to Dorothy: “That man has whiskers. Do you suppose he is our lone pirate?”

“I’d like to see this piratical individual you girls are talking about,” laughed Laura, who was nearest to the Lockwood twins.

At that moment Lance and Chet were walking back toward the entrance to the cave.

“Say, old man,” Lance asked his chum, “what were you searching that chamber in the cavern for? What did you expect to find?”

“I don’t know that I expected to find anything,” answered Chetwood Belding. “But I’ll

show you what I *did* find," and he drew from his pocket an old knife and placed it in Lance's hand.

The latter turned it over, and whistled under his breath. "I ought to know this old toad-stabber," he said. "Broken corkscrew—yes; small blade broken short off, too. Why, Chet, that's Short and Long's knife!"

"That's right."

"'And you mean to say you picked it up in the cavern?'"

"Right in that place where somebody had been camping," declared his chum. "But don't say anything about it. We can't do anything toward finding him with all these girls about. But, later——"

"You bet!" agreed Lance.

So the boys rather hurried the departure of the crowd for the place where the boats had been left, and where they had lunched. The walk through the cove did not take long, and the party, happy and laughing, crowded out upon the shore of the cove in front of the subterranean passage.

Instantly one of the twins drew the attention of all by uttering a startled little scream.

"What's the matter with you—er—Sister?" demanded the other Lockwood girl, with a chuckle.

"That wasn't the man we saw with Tony!" declared the girl who had cried out.

"What man?"

"The pirate," said the twin.

"How do you know?" demanded Laura, laughing.

"For I just saw him again. And he couldn't have gotten through the cave ahead of us."

"There are prowlers about," declared Chet to Lance.

"What sort of a looking man, Miss Lockwood?" demanded Lance.

"Oh, he's all bushy black whiskers and hair. I only saw the upper part of his body again. He dodged down behind that boulder yonder."

"Say! the other cave opening is over there," cried Bobby Hargrew.

"And that's a fact," admitted Chet.

"Let's see if the boats are all right," cried Lance, starting on a run for the landing.

"And the rest of the lunch, dear boy!" cried Prettyman Sweet, following him. "Weally, if that has been stolen it is a calamity."

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW SHELL

THE calamity had occurred!

Soulful were the wails of Purt Sweet. Not a crumb of food left in the girls' hampers when the party set out through the cave for the middle of Cavern Island was now left to appease Mr. Sweet's appetite.

"The lone pirate has done his fell work, sure enough," Laura Belding declared. "And how hungry he must have been, Nellie! He took that pie you made that none of us could eat."

They all laughed at this hit, for the doctor's daughter was not much of a pastry cook and her lemon pie had been voted the booby prize at luncheon.

"Ooh!" gasped Bobby. "Do you suppose it will kill him? Maybe it will give him such a terrible case of indigestion that he will steal a boat, raise the Jolly Roger again, and go to work making people walk the plank and all that sort of thing—and it will be your fault, Nellie Agnew!"

"I'm only arraid he will eat it and die in terrible agony all alone here," wailed Nellie, who could take a joke as well as give one. "And then his ghost will haunt this end of the island——"

"And Otto will never come here again," said Eve Sitz, poking fun at her brother, who had once been very much afraid of a supposed "haunt" in an old house in Robinson's Woods.

"Never you mind," growled her brother. "There iss ha'ants, undt you will findt oudt so some day—yes!"

But Chet and Lance decided that there were altogether too many prowlers at this end of the island for the party to remain longer. Had they been alone, or with the other boys and no girls, they would surely have made an attempt to find the bewhiskered man whom the Lockwood twins had twice seen disappear into the far entrance of the caverns.

"We ought to report him to the park police," said Nellie Agnew. "He may steal something more than food, next time."

"Leave that to us," said Chet, hastily. "Lance and I will report it in proper time."

But to his chum he whispered: "We don't want any police fooling around here. Suppose they found Short and Long?"

"Right—oh!" agreed Lance. "Hope they'll all forget it and not mention the 'lone pirate' when they get home."

But as events proved, some member of the party mentioned the robbery of the lunch—and in a quarter which brought a search of the eastern end of Cavern Island by the police, a happening that Chet would have given a good deal to avoid.

Now, however, Laura's brother was busy inventing something to interest the party, and yet take them away from this end of the island. The twins were discussing with Eve Sitz the advantages of paddling over rowing, when Chet gave a shout which drew all attention to him instantly.

"Come on!" said the big lad. "Let's get into the boats. We'll have a four-oared race. I'll choose a crew of boys and let Laura choose one of girls. I bet we boys, using my boat, can row around that channel buoy out yonder and back again, before Laura in Lance's boat can do it. And Lance has the lightest boat."

"Done!" cried his sister. "And Lance's boat isn't so much lighter, either. What do you say, girls?"

"Let's show 'em!" cried Bobby. "Let me steer, Laura."

"All right," said Laura.

"And Freddie Ackerman here will steer for us," said Chet.

The crews were quickly chosen. Laura took Eve and the twins with her. Chet had Purt Sweet for Number 2 and pulled stroke himself. Lance arranged the start and was referee.

"When I slap these two sticks together, you're to go," instructed Lance. "The line is right between where I stand here on this rock and the boulder at the far mouth of the cavern. I can see the whole course from here. Now, no bumping at the turn. The boat that has the inside at the buoy must be cleared by the other boat. Don't forget. Are you ready?"

"Oh, wait a minute!" squealed Purt Sweet.

"Yes, hold on!" grunted Chet. "Purt's back hair has come down."

"I weally will have to remove my waistcoat—if you will allow me?" suggested the exquisite. "It might get splashed."

"Go as far as you like," said Lance. "Chuck it ashore here. I'll stand on it so as to see better."

But Purt entrusted the precious waistcoat to one of the girls in another boat, and then the two racing boats were brought into line. The referee asked if they were ready again, and, receiving no contrary answer, shouted:

"Go!"

Chet's crew certainly were a scrub lot, and he did not expect to get much speed out of them; but Otto was a strong oar and had Purt been able to keep the stroke the girls would have made a bad showing to the buoy. Up to that turn the boys kept ahead. Laura set an easy stroke, and found that Eve Sitz was not much inferior to either Dora or Dorothy.

"They're going to beat!" gasped Bobby, swinging with the rowers.

"Don't let them worry you," advised Laura, between her teeth. "The race isn't done until we cross the line."

But in turning the buoy the boys came to grief. Or, rather, Purt Sweet came to grief. He managed to catch a most famous crab, and went over on his back, hitting his head a resounding crack upon the handle of Lance's oar, and waving his long legs in the air.

"Now!" cried Laura, increasing her stroke, and the girls' boat went past their opponents' at a fast clip.

The boys got together again after half a minute; but those thirty seconds told the story of the race. The best the boys could do brought them across the line several lengths behind. And the whole crowd were shouting with laughter over Purt's mishap.

"I wish you'd kept your vest on, Purt,"

snarled Lance. "There'd been some satisfaction in your getting it wet. My goodness! what a lubber you are in a boat!"

"Weally, I couldn't help it, dear boy," sighed Pretty.

"Just the same, you crabbed the race," grunted Chet. "Now the girls have put it all over us."

And the girls certainly did not spare the boys, and joked at their expense all the way home. But the day was voted a very merry one and Eve and Otto went home in the evening strongly of the opinion that the boys and girls of Central High were a jolly company indeed. Eve promised Laura before she went home that, if she could pass the exams. for junior classes under Principal Sharp, she would surely attend Central High in the fall.

"We've got a splendid bit of athletic timber in Eve Sitz," Laura said, discussing the matter with Jess and the Lockwood twins.

"I hope she'll take up rowing. We can put her into Celia's place on the eight for next year, and then there will be no danger of Hester Grimes getting it," said Jess, who was very outspoken.

"She is better material for stroke than Hester," admitted Laura.

"And enough sight better tempered," Dora observed.

"You know what Hester is doing now?" demanded Jess, in anger.

"What is it?" asked Dorothy.

"She is trying to make the other girls think that the Executive Committee only cares about the eight-oared boat race, and that we'll put up no fight for Central High's entries in the other events."

"She is going to make trouble if she can," declared Dora.

"It isn't so," Laura said, firmly. "There is going to be a fine canoe race—we look to you twins to make good for Central High in that."

"We'll do our best," said the twins together, nodding.

Aunt Dora did not approve of the twins being on the lake so much; in her girlhood "young ladies" of the twins' age did not row, and paddle, and swim, and otherwise imitate boys.

"And I remember that you never were any fun, as a girl, Dora," observed Mr. Lockwood, at the supper table that night, when his sister uttered her usual criticisms of the twins' conduct. "You squealed if you came across a caterpillar, and a garter snake sent you into spasms, and it tired you to walk half a mile, and——"

"Thanks be! I was no tomboy," gasped Aunt Dora.

"Far from it," said the flower lover. "And

mother was always having the doctor for you, and you got cold the easiest of any person I ever saw—and do to this day——”

“That is perfectly ridiculous, Lemuel.”

“I believe you’re sitting in a draught now, Dora,” said Mr. Lockwood, quickly.

“Well—I—— ‘Achoo! I believe you! I never did see such a draughty place as this house, Lemuel. Ahem! Dora! get me my little knit shawl, will you, child?’”

“Oh, yes, Auntie,” said one of the twins, as they both rose.

“We’re both through our suppers, Auntie,” said the other. “We’ll bring the shawl.”

“Now!” exclaimed the exasperated old lady, when the twins were out of the room. “Which of ’em went for it?”

Her brother shook his head sadly, but his eyes were a-twinkle. “I could not undertake to say, Sister.”

It annoyed Aunt Dora very much to hear the girls talk continually of the coming Big Day on Lake Luna and the part the girls of Central High would take in the races. And that next week Dora and Dorothy certainly were full of the new eight-oared shell.

It arrived at the boathouse early in the week, and proved to be the handsomest shell that had

ever been launched in Luna waters. Even the wealthy Luna Boat Club did not own a shell like it.

Every other afternoon Mrs. Case allowed the crew to go out for a spin, and Professor Dimp, who coached the boys' crews, looked after the girls' rowing, as well. Some of the girls' parents went down to the shore in the early evening to watch the practice work off Colonel Richard Swayne's estate; but would Aunt Dora go? Only once!

By some inquiry she learned that each member of the crew of eight girls had her own particular seat in the big shell. Dorothy was supposed to row Number 2 and Dora Number 6. But the twins sometimes changed seats—and who was to know the difference?

Not the coach, for Professor Dimp could tell them apart no better than other people. Had Aunt Dora been sure that her namesake rowed in her right place on the evening when she viewed the practice, she would have met the shell at the landing, seized Number 6 oar, and marched her home and locked her into her own room until tickets could be bought for Aunt Dora's home city.

But in their natty-looking costumes the twins looked more alike than ever—were that possible!

CHAPTER XV

TOMMY LONG HAS A BAD DAY

IT was all in the papers one evening about detectives from Centerport's police headquarters, aided by the park police, beating the eastern end of Cavern Island, and the caves as well, for poor Short and Long. Reporters had accompanied the expedition; but they rather made fun of the crowd of police searching so diligently for one small boy. It was suggested in the news stories that the efforts of the officers might better be aimed at finding the burglars themselves instead of chasing a frightened youngster who was supposed to have helped the real criminals.

The only thing the police succeeded in doing was to pick up two men who were fighting. These were Tony Allegretto, who had a concession at the amusement park, and another Italian.

The fight might have been a serious matter had not the police came upon the men when they did. Tony had already drawn a knife. The papers reported that Tony and his monkey were shut up together in the park calaboose waiting

for court to sit the next morning. The other Italian had been sent off the island and warned to keep away.

But no trace of Short and Long was found during the police search. Mr. Norman, the boat builder, raised the sunken rowboat Billy had borrowed, however, and brought it back to his landing.

The Lockwood twins chanced to be passing Mr. Norman's place when the old boat arrived, and they walked down the long dock to look at it.

"No sign of anything wrong having happened to little Billy," said Mr. Norman. "He tied this old craft, and she filled after a time and sank, breaking the painter, which was a long one. That's all that happened. I don't care about the boat a mite; I only wish I knew what has become of the poor little chap."

"They've just chased him away from home," said Dorothy. "Billy Long never helped those burglars."

"Of course he didn't," said Mr. Norman. "That's what *I* say. Only folks who don't know the boy will say they believe the police."

"And don't you believe Billy is over there on the island?" asked Dora.

"No. He's got away. He's a sharp boy, Billy is, and next thing you'll hear of him, he'll

be off working somewhere and sending his folks home a part of his wages, believe me! I know Billy Long," said the boat-builder.

The Longs lived not far from the Lockwood cottage, and the twins went around through their street. This was on one of those rare days when Alice Long, the oldest sister and the "mother" of the Long family, stayed at home from the box factory to "catch up" in her housework.

Until Mrs. Long died, two years before, Alice had gone to Central High, too, and she was a smart and intelligent girl. But she was a faithful one, as well, and she kept the home together for Mr. Long and the younger children, despite the fact that she could spend only a day once in a while at home. A younger girl did many of the ordinary household tasks, as well as looking after Master Tommy Long, an active piece of mischief now four years old.

As the twins came up the walk before the little cottage they heard Tommy bellowing at the top of his lungs—and they were perfectly sound lungs, too!

"What have you got in here—a lion?" asked Dorothy, putting her head in at the open door.

"Better say a monkey!" exclaimed Alice, much exasperated.

She was just then hustling Tommy across the floor so rapidly that the toes of his shoes scarcely

touched the carpet. Upstairs she went with struggling, roaring Master Tommy, and in another moment he was shut into a bedroom and the key turned in the lock.

"There!" gasped Alice, coming back and sitting down, after placing chairs for her visitors. "You think I'm rather harsh with the little plague? You don't know what he's done to-day."

"Has he been *very* bad?" asked the tender-hearted Dorothy.

"I should say he has!"

"What's he done?" demanded Dora.

"It has certainly been one of Tommy's 'bad days.' You'd think he was possessed. Poor mother! I can imagine the trouble she used to have with Billy."

"But what did Tommy do?" asked Dorothy, bent on trying to plead for the culprit, who was now alternately roaring and kicking the panels of the door upstairs.

"One thing he did was to pour sand into my tub of clothes that I had to leave this morning. He called the tub 'Lake Luna' and said he wanted to make an island in the middle of it, like Cavern Island where Billy is hidden."

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy.

"I had to clean out the tub and rinse the clothes half a dozen times to get the sand out."

"But, Billy!" exclaimed Dora. "They say he isn't over at that island."

"Well, I wish I knew where he was," sighed the worried sister.

Just then Tommy stopped yelling and spoke in a shrill, but perfectly plain tone:

"Sis! I'm a-goin' to bust a winder and fall out, I am!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Dorothy, jumping up. "He'll be hurt."

But Alice put forth a restraining hand to stop her before she could flee to the rescue.

"Don't bother. He doesn't want to jump himself. Tommy is bluffing."

"Bluffing!" gasped Dora. "Did you ever? I should be scared to death that the little scamp would do it."

"I used to be," sighed Alice. "Now I know better. I came to realize that Tommy was taking advantage of my love for him—and he's got to learn better than that."

"Isn't he a scamp?" whispered Dorothy.

In a few moments, after silence from the "chamber of torture," the shrill voice cried again:

"Sis! I've found the matches an' I'm a-goin' to set fire to the curtains—now you see!"

The twins gazed upon the calm face of Alice with wide-open eyes. Alice went on talking

without showing the first signs of fear that Master Tommy would keep his pledge. She was resting after a hard day's work, and she enjoyed having her old schoolmates drop in to see her.

After further silence, the boy's shrill voice took up the cry again:

"Sis! don't you smell sumfin burnin'?"

"I *do* believe I smell something burning—cloth, or something," whispered the nervous Dorothy, sniffing.

"It's an old black rag I put in the kitchen fire, without opening the damper," said Alice, coolly.

"Suppose he *has* got the matches?" demanded Dora.

"There are none in that room," returned Alice, placidly.

"Goodness me!" gasped Dorothy. "I wouldn't have a boy around for a farm!"

Again came the wail from above:

"If you don't smell nothin', Sis, it's 'cause I pulled off all the match heads an' swallowed 'em! I'm goin' ter die—I'se p'izened, Sis!"

"Why! what a dreadful little scamp he is," gasped Dorothy.

Alice jumped up, with her lips set tightly. She ran into the kitchen, from which she returned in a moment with a cup of warm water and mustard.

"He's got to be taught a lesson," declared the

much troubled sister, with decision, and she marched upstairs.

"Now, Tommy, if you have swallowed match-heads, you must take this," declared Alice Long, and when Master Tommy, now rather disturbed by the prospect of the ill-smelling cup, tried to escape, she got his head "in chancery," held his nose until he opened his mouth, and made him swallow the entire mess.

It was certainly a bad dose, and its effects were almost immediate and quite surprising to Master Tommy. The twins waited below stairs while the trouble continued; and finally down came Alice with Master Tommy—a much sadder, wiser, and humbled youngster—by the hand.

"I—I'm going to be a good boy," announced Master Tommy, making a wry face.

"I should think you would," Dora said, trying to be severe.

"That's all right," grumbled Tommy, turning to Dorothy for comfort. "I didn't swaller any matchheads."

"Why did you say you did?" asked Dorothy.

"Just to plague Alice. But I won't do it again. Ugh! that was nasty stuff she gave me. That's what she'd give me if I *was* p'izen^d. I don't want to be p'izen^d," declared the little fellow, frankly.

"And you don't want to say what isn't so, either, eh?" queried Dora.

"We-ell," said Master Tommy, slowly, "lots of things that *ain't* so, is better than them that *are* so. There's fairy stories."

"Quite right," said Dora, quickly. "But there's nightmares, too—bad dreams, you know. They are not so, but they aren't pleasant to dream, are they?"

"Oh, no!" cried Tommy. "And I had a terrible bad dream—onct! And I was scart—yes, sir! And Billy heard me crying and he took me out of my crib and took me into bed with him."

Alice smiled. "I remember Tommy told about that. He said the cats got to fighting and were scratching and biting him."

"And Billy woked me up and took me to bed with him," said Tommy, placidly. "I wish Billy would come home again."

"When did this happen?" asked Dorothy, quickly, trying to turn the conversation from an unpleasant topic, as Alice's eyes filled with tears.

"Just the other night," said Tommy.

"But Billy's been away two weeks."

"It was jes' afore he went-ed away."

"It wasn't long before Billy went," agreed Alice, nodding.

"I know when!" cried Tommy. "It was the

night afore I felled and scraped my knee on the doorstep."

"Why, Tommy!" cried his sister, springing out of her chair. "Are you sure of that?"

"Yes'm. I be sure," declared Tommy. "I dreamed the cats were scratchin' me; an' then that very nex' mornin' the old doorstep scratched me!" cried the small boy.

Alice turned to her visitors, her face pale in her earnestness.

"Oh, girls!" she cried. "I remember that night of Tommy's dream very well. He hurt his knee on Wednesday—the morning following the burglary. Billy took Tommy into bed with him before midnight, and they slept together all night. Doesn't that prove that Billy was not out of the house on the night of the burglary? Doesn't it?"

Dora and Dorothy looked at each other, and each slowly shook her head.

"Do you suppose the police would accept Tommy's testimony?" Dora asked, sadly.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CANOE RACE

THE twins were very sorry for Alice and the other Longs and they did not believe the absent Billy guilty as charged; but who in authority would believe the testimony of such a little boy as Tommy? The fact that Billy had been at home, and in his bed, all the night of the burglary at Stresch & Potter's store was established in the minds of Billy's friends only.

The twins saw Chet Belding on the way home and heard some news, after telling Billy's friend of what Tommy had said.

"Of course Billy hadn't any hand in that robbery," Chet declared. "But I wish he hadn't run away. Father and Mr. Hargrew say they'd both go his bail. I wish I knew where he was."

"Didn't you think he was hiding somewhere on Cavern Island?" asked Dora, shrewdly.

"Yes, I did. I found his knife Saturday when we were in that cave," admitted Chet, frankly. "Don't you girls tell anybody. But Lance and I

were through all the caverns with a man who knows them like a book—that was after the police searched. He couldn't be found.

"Oh, and I say! did you hear about Tony and his monkey?"

"We read that Tony had been fighting and was arrested," Dorothy said.

"Yep. And it was a near thing he didn't get sent to jail. The judge only fined him. The other man the police drove out of Centerport altogether. They thought he was the worse of the two. And Tony had paid for his concession at the park, and promised to be good.

"But the joke of it is," continued Chet, laughing, "the police don't want Tony to tell all he knows. You see, they shut him into the calaboose at the park and when they went to take him across on the boat to court, Tony wasn't there."

"He had escaped?" interrupted Dorothy.

"That's what," said Chet. "And how do you suppose he'd done it?"

"We couldn't guess," cried the girls.

"Why, the monkey unlocked the door of the cage and let his master out. The jailer had left the key in the lock while he went to breakfast, and the monkey did the rest. You know, that was one of the tricks we saw him do," continued Chet.

"Tony didn't think he had to stay in jail if the door was unlocked, so he walked down to his booth and got his own breakfast. And the police found him there and took him along to court. But they were easy on Tony for fear he would make the park police the laughing stock of the city. Lance and I happened to be over there early—it was when we searched for Billy in the caves—and we saw Tony re-arrested."

"That Italian must be a bad one," Dora said. "How did he get off?"

"Tony said the man he was fighting with cheated him out of his share of some money," replied Chet. "And that man is gone, so who is to know the truth?"

The stretch of placid Lake Luna between the boat landing of Central High and the easterly end of Cavern Island was dotted with craft of various kinds and sizes, several afternoons later, when the twins slipped away from Aunt Dora and—with a word to their father in a whisper as to their goal—ran down to the dock and got their canoe into the lake.

Aunt Dora was suffering from what she called a "grumbly head"—which meant that she had a mild attack of neuralgia.

"But mercy, sirs!" Mrs. Betsey said, in a tone of exasperation rather strange for that dear

old lady, "she has a 'grumbly' tongue all the time. I don't know what I shall do about keeping Mary if she stays much longer, girls."

"For the good of the family I may have to admit my identity and go home with her," groaned Dora.

"No, you sha'n't!" cried her twin. "You shall not be sacrificed. If Mary goes, we'll divide the work between us, and hire a laundress once a week to relieve Mrs. Betsey."

"My! what a bright girl you are, Dory," laughed Dora. "You've got it all fixed, haven't you? But what about after-hour athletics? No canoeing, and other fun. We'd have all our time out of school taken up with the housework."

"I don't care, Dora!" said Dorothy, firmly. "You could never live with Auntie. Why, she'd nag you to death."

"Dear old thing!" sighed Dora. "I wish she could see herself as others see her. How do you suppose papa came to have such a sister?"

"He has all the mildness of his generation of Lockwoods, and Aunt Dora has all the militancy."

"Oh, see there!" exclaimed her sister. "Hester Grimes and Lily Pendleton out in Hessie's canoe."

"That's a fine canoe," said Dorothy. "It's better than ours."

"But I believe we can beat them just the same."

"I shouldn't wonder if Hessie and Lily were intending to try for the honor of representing Central High in the girls' canoeing contest next month."

"I bet you!" returned her sister. "But Mrs. Case and the girls will have something to say about that."

"Mrs. Case has our records; but I heard that she will time us all again before the Big Day."

"We must do our very best, then," Dora declared, earnestly.

"True as you live!" her twin agreed.

They launched their canoe, stepped in lightly, knelt on the cushions, and dipped their paddles in the water. The craft shot away from the landing amid the approving remarks of the bystanders. The twins certainly did manage their canoe in admirable style.

The rhythm of their bodies, as they swayed to the paddling, was perfect. Their strokes were deep and in unison. The drops that flashed from their paddles as they came out of the water shone like jewels in the sun. The twins had a splendid reach and at every stroke the light canoe leaped ahead and trembled through all its frame.

Other boating parties saw them coming and

gave the twins a clear way—all but Hester and Lily. They seemed to be waiting, and Hester flung a backward look every now and then as the Lockwood girls drew farther out into the lake.

“They’re speeding up, too,” said Dorothy to her sister.

“Let’s race them, if they want to,” Dora returned. “Who’s afraid?”

“You know Mrs. Case would rather we did not race crews that intend to compete for the trophies.”

“We—ell! The lake’s free. And we’re going the same way Hester and Lily are. If they race us, what’s the odds?”

Dorothy was just as eager for a trial of speed as her sister. She nodded, and increased the power of her stroke, for she chanced to have the bow.

Immediately Hester and Lily redoubled their efforts and the handsome canoe belonging to the butcher’s daughter shot ahead at a swifter pace. But the twins were in fine fettle, and their craft gradually crept up on the one in the lead.

It was evident to everybody who was near that Hester and Lily were putting forth all their strength to keep the Lockwoods from passing them, and some of the nearby boating parties cheered the race on.

Dora and Dorothy kept steadily at work, speaking no word, but gradually increasing their stroke until their craft was fairly flying through the calm water. Hester and Lily were older girls, and heavier; but they hadn't the lithe strength and skill of the twins.

Nearer and nearer the latter's canoe drew to Hester Grimes's boat. The twins were breathing easily, but to their full lung capacity, when they drew beside the other canoe; but they could hear Hester pant and Lily groan as they strained at the paddles.

On and on crept the second canoe, its bow soon at the middle of Hester's boat. Only a couple of yards divided the contestants. Several four-oared boats and the boys' eight-oared shell kept pace with them, and cheered the race.

The twins weaved back and forth like a perfect piece of mechanism. It was a pretty sight to watch them. The paddling of Hester and her chum was more ragged; but they were making a good fight.

The twins' canoe, however, continued to forge ahead. There was little doubt that they would soon pass their rivals.

And just then Hester uttered an angry cry, dipped her paddle more deeply, swerved her canoe, and its side came directly in the path of the twins' boat.

“Look out!” shrieked Lily. “You’ll run us down!”

And that is what the twins did.

Crash went their canoe into that of Hester; both boats tipped alarmingly, and in a moment all four girls were struggling in the lake.

CHAPTER XVII

MISS CARRINGTON IN JUDGMENT

"OH! OH! I'm drowning!" shrieked Lily Pendleton.

And then the water filled her mouth and she went down with a "blub, blub, blub" that sounded most convincing.

Hester was sputtering threats and cries, too, and she paid no attention to her chum, who, although she could swim pretty well, lost her head very easily in moments of emergency.

The twins said never a word. They had gone under at the first plunge, but they were up again, shook the water from their eyes, and each took hold of their boat to right it.

When Lily screamed and went under, however, the Lockwoods chanced to be even nearer to her than was Hester.

"We've got to get her!" gasped Dorothy.

"Sure we have!" agreed Dora.

And together, leaving their canoe, they dived after the sinking girl. Lily was not unconscious,

and the moment one of the twins grabbed her, Lily tried to entwine her in her arms.

But thanks to Mrs. Case's earnest efforts in the swimming pool, the twins knew well how to break the grasp of a drowning person, and the girl who had been seized by Lily did not lose her head, but immediately broke the frightened girl's hold and quickly brought her to the surface.

Lily was between Dora and Dorothy, and when she had gotten rid of some of the water, and opened her eyes, she became amenable to advice. Together the twins towed her to a launch that came shooting up, and Lily was hauled inboard. Dora and Dorothy were intending to go back and right their canoe; but some of the boys had done that for them, and rescued their paddles and other boat furnishings.

"Let us help you in here, young ladies; then we'll go after that other girl," offered those on the launch. "The boys will take the 'canoes back to the boathouse, and that's where you would better be. There's a cool wind blowing."

So the twins hoisted themselves over the gun-whale of the launch as handily as boys, and the next time Hester Grimes was dragged in. And a madder girl than Hester it would have been hard to find!

"It's all your fault!" she concluded, shaking

her sleek, black head at the Lockwood twins.
"You bumped right into us."

"And you turned your canoe so that we should bump you," said Dora, tartly. "You were afraid of being beaten. I wish we'd smashed your old canoe!"

"You'll have to pay for it if it's damaged," declared Hester, nodding with determination.

But the boys who brought in the two canoes pricked the bubble of Hester's rage: They told Mrs. Case and the professor just how the trouble had occurred.

"You have no complaint, Hester," said Mrs. Case, later. "There are too many witnesses against you. I am afraid you are not over-truthful in this. However, I shall report the four of you for demerits. You had no business to race. I have forbidden it. And you can see yourselves how unfortunate interclass trials of speed may be. Now! no more of it, young ladies!"

Hester went off with her nose in the air after somebody had brought her dry clothing from home; but Lily Pendleton was grateful to the twins for helping her.

"Though I declare! I don't know which of you to thank," she said, giggling. "And one's just as wet as the other. Anyhow, I'm obliged."

"You're welcome, Lily," said one of the

twins. "We are sworn to solemn secrecy never to tell on each other; so you will have to embalm us both in your gratitude."

Miss Pendleton was not quite all "gall and wormwood," as Bobby Hargrew said Hester was; but the girls of Central High as a whole did not care much for Lily because she aped the fashions of her elders, and tried to appear "grown up." And when she came in from her unexpected dip in the lake it was noticeable that her cheeks were much paler than they had been when she started with her chum in the canoe. Because she had a naturally pale complexion, Lily was forever "touching it up"—as though even the most experienced "complexion artist" could improve upon Nature, or could do her work so well that a careful observer could not tell the painted from the real.

The twins went home in borrowed raincoats over their wet garments; nor did they escape Aunt Dora's sharp eyes—and of course, her sharp tongue was exercised, too.

"Now!" complained Dora, in their own room, "if our athletic field and the building were constructed, we wouldn't have been caught. Every girl is to have a locker of her own, and there will be dressing rooms, and a place to dry wet clothing, of course—and everything scrumptious!"

"Never mind," said her twin. "It's coming.

Such fine basket-ball courts! And tennis courts! And a running track, too! I heard somebody say that they would begin the excavation for the building next week. I tell you, Central High will have the finest field and track and gym. in the whole State."

"And East and West Highs are just as jealous as they can be," Dora remarked: "They've got to wake up, just the same, to beat the girls of Central High."

"Thanks to Mother Wit," added Dorothy.

"Yes. We must thank Laura Belding for interesting Colonel Swayne and his daughter in our athletics," agreed Dora.

The next morning the twins went to school in some trepidation. There was no knowing what Miss Grace G. Carrington, their teacher, would do about the four girls whom the physical instructor had reported. The Lockwood girls never curried favor with any teacher, save that they were usually prompt in all lessons, and their deportment was good. But even Gee Gee seldom had real fault to find with them.

When they came into the class-room before Assembly, however, they found Hester Grimes at the teacher's desk, and Hester did not seem to be worried over any punishment. The twins looked at each other, and Dora whispered:

"I bet you she's up to some trick. Trust Hes-

sie for getting out of a scrape if there's any possible chance for it."

"Well, I don't see how Miss Carrington can make an exception in her case. All four of us were in it."

"All four of us were in the lake, all right," giggled Dora; "but I bet Hessie isn't punished for her part of it."

"I declare it was her fault," said Dorothy, hotly. "She turned her boat right in our path."

"Wait!" whispered her twin, warningly.

Miss Carrington looked upon them coldly, and after they had returned from the morning exercises in the main hall she called Dora and Dorothy to her desk.

"Mrs. Case reports your rough and unlady-like conduct on the lake yesterday," said the teacher, rather grimly. "Of course, it was out of school hours, but as long as you accept the use of the school paraphernalia and buildings for after-hour athletics, you are bound by the school rules. You understand that?"

"Yes, Miss Carrington," said Dora. "But if you will let us explain——"

"I have the report," interposed Gee Gee, in her very grimmest manner. "In fact, I consider your running into and overturning the other canoe a very reprehensible act indeed. You

might have all been drowned because of the recklessness of you two girls."

"But Miss Carrington! it was not our fault," gasped Dorothy.

"Your canoe ran the other one down, didn't it?"

"But——"

"Yes, or no, young ladies!" snapped Gee Gee.

The twins nodded. Miss Carrington's mind was evidently made up on this point.

"Very well, then. No after-hour athletics for you for a month. That is all," and the teacher turned to the papers on her desk.

CHAPTER XVIII

MOTHER WIT'S DISCOVERY

"AND that shuts us out of the races!"

Dora broke another rule when she whispered this to her twin as they took their seats. Dorothy was almost in tears. But the twins could not tell the other girls of Gee Gee's proclamation until the first intermission.

"She's just as mean as she can be!" proclaimed Bobby Hargrew who, as Jess said, always blew up at the slightest provocation.

"Hester did it. She's always doing something mean," declared Jess herself.

"Well, there was an infraction of Mrs. Case's rules," said Laura Belding. "But it does seem as though Miss Carrington delights in setting obstacles in the way of Central High winning an athletic event. She is, deep down in her heart, opposed to after-hour athletics."

"She's just as much opposed to them," said Dorothy, "as our Aunt Dora."

"It's a mean shame!" declared Nellie Agnew, who was not usually so vigorous of speech.

"And you see, Hester Grimes and Lily Pendleton aren't penalized," said the furious Bobby. "They have crawled out of it. And I saw the whole race, and know it was Hester's fault that there was a spill."

"Let's take it to Mr. Sharp," cried Jess.

"That would do no good. You know he will not interfere with Miss Carrington's mandates. She has judged the case to the best of her knowledge and belief," said Laura.

"Hester is her favorite," complained Bobby.

"And we have no right to say that. She is punishing the twins for breaking a plain rule. If we tried to expose the whole affair, and bring the witnesses to prove our side, we would only be getting Hester and Lily into trouble, too, without making the twins' case any better," said the wise Laura.

"They ought to be conditioned as well," declared Nellie, who had a strong sense of justice.

"It looks so. But Miss Carrington probably thinks, believing that Dora and Dorothy are at fault for the spill, that the others were enough punished by being swamped. Of course, they should not have raced canoes without the race being arranged by either Mrs. Case or Professor Dimp."

"Huh! Old Dimple could come forward and save Dora and Dorothy from the penalty. Why,

whatever will we do?" cried Bobby. "It spoils our chance for the cup again."

"And it's such a beauty!" sighed Jess Morse.

For a week the handsome silver cup offered as a prize to the High School eight-oared crews on the Big Day had been on exhibition in the window of Mr. Belding's jewelry store. Later it would be exhibited both in Keyport and Lumberport for a week each. It was one of the handsomest trophies to be raced for in the coming aquatic sports.

"But, see here!" cried Bobby. "Here's another thing. Hester has played her cards well, I must say."

"What now, Clara?" asked Nellie Agnew.

"Why, Hester and Lily are not conditioned. They can still practice canoeing under the rules. And they will be the best crew for Central High to put forward for the canoe race. Now, what do you think of that?"

"And Dora and Dorothy would surely have won *that* race!" wailed Jess. "Of course, Hessie always gets the best of it!"

"I wish we'd smashed her old canoe all to flinders!" ejaculated Dora, desperately.

But, "if wishes were horses beggars might ride," as Laura pointed out. The milk was spilled. There was nothing to do but to abide by Miss Carrington's decision and help Mrs. Case

pick two of the best rowers for the twins' places in the eight-oared shell. And that was not an easy matter, for to arrange a well-balanced crew of eight is not the easiest thing in the world.

That very afternoon the physical instructor and Professor Dimp worked out the crew in the new shell with two other girls in the twins' places. Dora and Dorothy would not even go down to the boathouse; they were heartbroken. And Mrs. Case intimated to the other girls that she was very sorry she had been obliged to report the twins' infringement of the rules. Of course, she would not criticise Miss Carrington's harsh punishment; but she would not heed Hester Grimes's request for permission to be "tried out" in the shell.

"You are too heavy, Miss Grimes, for either Number 2 or Number 6 oar," said the physical instructor, shortly, and Hester complained to some of the girls who would listen to her that the physical instructor "showed favoritism."

"Never mind," scoffed Bobby Hargrew, "you've got Gee Gee on your side. You have spoiled the chance of Central High winning that cup. I wish you went to another school, Hessie. You're never loyal to this one!"

Although the girls of Central High were giving so much thought to the coming boat races, other athletics were not neglected at this time,

nor were their text books. Indeed, a very wise precaution of the Girls' Branch Athletic League was that which provided that no girl could take part in after-hour athletics, or compete for trophies and pins, who did not stand well in both classes and deportment.

That rule was the one that hit the Lockwood twins so hard at this time. And Miss Carrington's harsh interpretation of it caused them much sorrow. The regular school gymnastics, and the like, were all the activities they might indulge in at present, under the league rules.

Of course they owned their own canoe and spent much time improving their stroke in a borrowed rowboat. But they were debarred from even the walks conducted by Mrs. Case. There was one scheduled for the following Saturday afternoon, and it promised to be most interesting. Some of the girls were taking botany as a side study, and Mrs. Case was an enthusiastic botanist herself. Therefore a "botanic junket," as Bobby Hargrew called it, was promised for this present occasion.

The teacher did not often lead her pupils through the city, if that could be helped; usually the girls rode to the end of some electric car line and there began their jaunt.

But this time they gathered at the boat landing where the *Lady of the Lake* transported

visitors to Cavern Island. There were nearly thirty of the girls present, including Bobby Hargrew.

Nellie Agnew was eating an apple, but she had only had a few to distribute to her friends who had arrived first, and Bobby missed her share.

"Gimme the core!" exclaimed Bobby, grinning in her impish way.

"Ain't going to be no core!" quoted Nellie, laughing, as she offered that succulent morsel to a truck horse standing by the curb.

"Hah!" exclaimed Bobby, "you're just as generous as Tommy Long."

"What has he done now?" demanded Nellie. "He certainly is a little scamp. Just as full of mischief as poor Billy."

"Why, Tommy wasn't as generous with some fruit or other that he had, and Alice took him to task for it. She gave him a lecture on generosity. 'I'm goin' to be awful gen'rous with you, Kit,' he told his little sister, Katie, afterward. 'I is always goin' to give you the inside of the peaches and the outside of the owanges!' 'And that's about your idea of generosity, Nellie,'" laughed Bobby.

Mrs. Case arrived just then and they took the steamer across to the amusement park. But they did not linger. There was a good path through the "woodsy" part of the island, and the party

set out on this way almost immediately. There were some open fields on Cavern Island as well as woods, and the superintendent of the park cultivated a little farm.

As the party skirted the ploughed fields some crows, doing all the damage they could among the tender corn sprouts, rose and swept lazily across the vista to the woods, with raucous cawings.

"Oh, Mrs. Case!" cried Bobby.

"What now, Clara?" was the teacher's response.

"You know something about birds, don't you?"

"A little," replied Mrs. Case, cautiously, although the girls knew that she was really much interested in bird-lore.

"Then tell me something I've long wanted to know," cried Bobby, her eyes dancing.

"And what is that?"

"What really is the cause of the crow's caws?"

"A bone in his throat, I expect, my dear," replied the teacher, amid the laughter of the other girls. "But this is a botanical expedition, not ornithological. What was your question about the anemone, Nellie?"

They passed the farm and mounted the hillside toward the upper plateau above the caverns

at Boulder Head. From this point they could see from end to end of Luna Lake, and the greater part of the island itself. But just below them, on the shore at the foot of the rugged cliff, it was not so easy to see; and, when Laura Belding and Jess, walking with arms around each other's waists, on the very verge of the cliff, heard a sound which startled them below, they could not at first see what caused it.

"It was a human voice!" gasped Jess.

"Somebody groaning," admitted Laura.

"I—I bet it is a ghost, after all," giggled Jess. "Otto Sitz won't want to come here again if we tell him——"

"Hush!" commanded Laura. "There is somebody below—in trouble. Wait! Cling to my belt, Jess—and to that sapling with your other hand. Now, don't let me fall."

"Go ahead," said Jess, between her teeth, as Laura swung her body out over the brink of the hundred-foot drop. "I can hold you."

"I can see him!" gasped Laura, after a moment. "It is somebody lying on a narrow shelf half way down the cliff. It's a boy—yes! I see his face——"

"Billy! Billy Long! what is the matter with you, Billy?" she demanded the next moment.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESCUE

THE other girls—and even Mrs. Case—came running to the spot. The teacher kept the other girls back and herself took Josephine Morse's place and gripped Laura firmly as the latter hung over the brink of the cliff.

Laura continued to call; but although she thought she had seen the boy on the shelf below move, he did not reply. His face was very white.

"He's unconscious! He's hurt!" Laura gasped.

"How do you suppose he ever got there?" demanded Jess.

"The question is: How shall we get him up?" demanded Mrs. Case, briskly.

"I can get down to him—I know I can," cried Laura.

"You'll break your neck climbing down there!" declared the doctor's daughter. "I wouldn't risk it."

"But he's helpless. He may be badly hurt," reiterated Laura.

"My dear! it would be very dangerous climbing down to the ledge," warned Mrs. Case. "And how would you get back?"

"But somebody has got to go down to get Billy," declared Laura. "And perhaps moments may be precious. We don't know how long he has been there, or how badly he is hurt."

"Laura can climb like a goat," said her chum, doubtfully.

"And I'm going to try it. If we only had a rope——"

"I'll run back to that farmhouse and get a rope—and some men to help, perhaps," suggested Jess.

"Good!" exclaimed Laura. "Go ahead, and I'll be getting down to Billy meanwhile."

"That would be best, I suppose," admitted their teacher. "But be very careful, Laura."

Jess had started on the instant, and her fleet steps quickly carried her out of sight. Laura swung herself down to the first rough ledge by clinging to the bushes that grew on the edge of the cliff.

"Oh, perhaps I am doing wrong!" moaned Mrs. Case, at this juncture. "I may be sending her to her death!"

"Don't worry!" called up Laura, from below.
"It is not so hard as it looks."

But there were difficulties that those above could not see. Within twenty feet the girl came to a sheer wall which extended all along the face of the cliff, and fifteen feet in height. It looked for a minute as though she were balked.

But a rather large tree grew just above this drop, and its limbs extended widely and were "limber." Laura climbed into this tree as well as any boy, worked herself along the bending limb, which was tough, and finally let herself down and swung from it, bearing the lithe limb downward with her weight.

Her feet did not then touch the shelf below, however, and she really overhung the abyss. It was a perilous situation and she was glad that Mrs. Case could not see from above what she was doing.

To make matters worse, it was doubtful if she could climb back upon the limb. Muscular as she was, *that* was a feat that took real practice to accomplish. She swung there, like a pendulum, neither able to get up, nor daring to drop.

Suddenly something snapped above her. She cast up a fearful glance and saw that the limb was giving with her weight. Dragged down so heavily, the bark and fibres of the wood were

parting. There was already a white gash across the tree-trunk where the limb was attached to the tree.

She was falling. The splitting wood warned her that the entire branch was separating from the trunk!

With a crash she fell. Fortunately the splitting flung her toward the face of the cliff. She landed upon her feet, and held her position, letting go of the branch, which whirled down the cliff side to the sea.

Laura, trembling a good deal, gazed down upon the shelf where Billy Long was. He had not been disturbed, but lay as when she first saw him from the top of the cliff.

"But we'll never be able to get up *this* place," murmured Laura, looking up at the sheer wall down which she had come so perilously.

But from this point where she stood to the spot where Billy lay was only a rough scramble. She was beside the youth in a very few moments.

Billy lay senseless, the stain of berries on his lips, and one foot drawn under him. When Laura shook him, he moaned. Then she saw that the shoe had been removed from the hurt foot and the stocking, as well. Billy's ankle was painfully bruised and wrenched; it was col-

ored blue, green and yellow, in streaks, and had evidently been bruised for some time.

"Billy! Billy!" cried Laura, shaking him by the shoulder.

"I—I fell. Oh! Water!" moaned Billy, without opening his eyes.

He was very weak, and completely helpless; nor did he regain consciousness. Laura had to await Josephine's return before she could do anything to aid him.

Then Jess produced nothing but a clothesline; there had been no men at the farm, and she had taken the only rope they had, and run all the way back. But it was a strong line, and there was more than a hundred feet of it.

"You can never raise either of us to the top of the cliff, Mrs. Case," shouted Laura from below. "I am going to take the line, double it, and lower Billy to the shore myself. Somebody can go back to the park and hire that launch that is to let there, and bring it around to this cove. The man will come with it. The rest of you can go through the cave and meet us on the shore; or go back to the park landing."

And so it was arranged. Laura, with the expenditure of considerable ingenuity and muscle, got Billy safely to the foot of the cliff, and then worked her own way down by the rope without

cutting her hands. She made a sling of her dress skirt in which to lower Billy, and had she not been a very strong and determined girl she would have dropped him.

The adventure broke up the walking party for that afternoon; but Short and Long, after being three weeks away from home, in hiding, was returned to his father and sister, and the doctor was called to attend him. He was too weak and confused, as yet, to tell his story.

CHAPTER XX

BILLY'S STORY

THE Lockwood twins were among the first of Short and Long's school friends who called at the cottage the following morning for news of the injured boy. The physician had kept even the department store detective at a distance. The latter was an officious individual who would have put Billy in jail at once had he had the power to do so.

The regular police, however, seemed to have their doubts about Billy's complicity in the burglary of Stresch & Potter's store, and they kept away from the house, only the patrolman on beat inquiring how he was. As they had promised, either Mr. Belding, the jeweler, or Mr. Hargrew, the grocer, was ready to go bail for Billy Long, if he was arrested.

Of course the boy denied the accusation made against him. 'As little Tommy had said, he was certainly at home all the night of the robbery. Whether any court would accept Tommy's testimony was another thing.

Billy admitted helping the surveyors in the lot behind the department store. He understood they were surveying for a railroad siding, not for a new street. Information of such engineers might be had at the offices of one of the railroads entering Centerport—if the surveyors had not been the burglars who later broke into the store and burst the safe.

"But those fellows were surveyors, all right, all right," declared Billy Long, weakly. "And they were not the fellows I saw afterward——"

"After what, Billy?" demanded Dora Lockwood, eagerly.

"Yes; do tell us all about it," urged Dorothy.

"I don't know anything about their old robbery," said the boy, angrily. "That man from the store kept coming here and threatening to put me in jail. And I didn't want to go to jail. I guess I wouldn't have had any worse time than I *did* have. For when Laura found me I hadn't eaten anything but a handful of berries that I could reach on that ledge, for 'most two days!"

"Oh, oh! How dreadful!" cried the twins.

"Guess I should have died," Billy said, more cheerfully, enjoying the sensation he was creating. "And you bet that stuff I swiped out of your boats last Saturday a week ago, just came in handy."

"Oh, Billy! was that you?" demanded Dora.

"The lone pirate!" gasped Dorothy.

"And all those whiskers——"

Short and Long laughed weakly. "That wig and whiskers I had last Hallow E'en; don't you remember? I saw you girls a couple of times, too."

"And we saw you and thought you might be one of the robbers, after all."

"That's all right; I didn't do any robbing, except of your boats," said Billy. "But there were two fellows over on the island who I believe *did* rob that store."

"No!" cried the girls.

"Yes."

"Oh, tell us all about it," urged the girls again, just as eager to hear the particulars as though it were a story out of a book. And it *did* sound like a story; only Billy Long was much too much in earnest to make it up. Besides, he had learned a lesson during his weeks of "hiding out."

"I was scart—of course I was," he said. "What fellow wouldn't be? That detective from the store said they'd put me in jail till I'd told—and I'd been tellin' him the truth right along."

"So I got up early that morning to go fishing. I knew where the white perch were thick as

sprats. I got Mr. Norman's boat; but I knew he wouldn't mind. And I went over to Boulder Head. As I was starting to fish I heard two men talking just in the mouth of the old cavern. They were quarreling. I guess they must have been foreigners; I couldn't understand all they said. But I got enough of their broken-English talk to understand that one of them had hidden some money in a tight-covered lard can, and part of the money the other fellow claimed."

Dora pinched Dorothy, and looked at her knowingly. But it wasn't until afterward that Dorothy understood what her twin meant by *that*.

"So I got interested in them, believing that they might be the real burglars, and I forgot the boat. When they went away and I went back to the boat, the old thing had filled and sunk. You never could row that boat to the island without bailing her out a couple of times; and I ought to have dragged her ashore.

"So I couldn't get the boat up, and I thought I'd stop there. I had some fishing tackle, and matches, and some crackers. I camped in the cave for a couple of days, and had fires, and cooked fish. But, my goodness! fish gets awful tasteless when you don't have any salt and pepper.

"There were berries," continued Billy, "and I managed to get along. Then, I washed out my

old bait bucket and at night I went down to the pasture of that park superintendent and milked his old mooley cow. I got along.

"One of those men was always hanging about in the woods, though, and that kept me scared. But I tried to watch him. Didn't know but he'd go to the place where he'd buried the money in the lard can. But he went off after a while and I didn't see him again.

"Then I tried to climb that cliff to get some berries, and I slipped down and twisted my ankle. I guess I'd have starved to death there if Mother Wit han't found me and got me down."

This was all Billy's story; but when the twins got out of the house, Dorothy demanded of her sister:

"What did you pinch me for? What did you mean?"

"You're so slow!" cried Dora, with some disgust. "Those two foreign men Billy heard talking about the money were Tony Allegretto and his friend that the police drove off the island. They weren't the burglars at all!"

CHAPTER XXI

IN PRACTICE AGAIN

ALL the time the twins had been forbidden to row in the new shell the crew had been getting on very badly. Professor Dimp was hopeless, and Mrs. Case could not find two girls to take the twins' places who worked well with the other members of the crew.

Dora and Dorothy could only walk on the bank of the lake and watch the crew struggle to make the time that was its former record. Hester Grimes and her particular friends scoffed at the practice. Hester and Lily paddled almost daily in their canoe, and they seemed pretty sure of being chosen to represent the girls of Central High in the canoe race instead of the Lockwood twins.

Aunt Dora wished to know why Dora and Dorothy were not giving so much "precious time," as she expressed it, to athletics as formerly, and the twins had to tell her.

"Humph!" was the old lady's comment; but

perhaps she did not feel all the satisfaction that exclamation implied when she saw how downhearted the girls seemed when she walked with them again along the gravel walk that skirted the waterfront of Colonel Swayne's estate.

The girls' eight-oared shell was out and the crew were practicing. One of the new girls caught an awful crab and the shell came near being swamped.

"Mercy me!" ejaculated Aunt Dora. "Is that the best they can do without you girls to help them?"

This rather amused the twins, despite their sore-heartedness; but their aunt really began to "take up cudgels" for them. She objected to the punishment Gee Gee had meted out to her nieces.

"I didn't like the looks of that four-eyed teacher, anyway," declared the old lady, with some asperity. "I'm going to see about it. Your father would just let you be driven from pillar to post—he's got no spunk. What you Lockwoods need in this town is a woman in the family!"

Dora and Dorothy thought this was only a threat. But Aunt Dora actually appeared at Central High the next morning and obtained an audience with Mr. Sharp, the principal.

Whatever she said to him bore fruit in a quiet investigation on the principal's part into the pros and cons of the canoe bumping that had brought the Lockwood twins to grief. He heard the testimony of eye witnesses of the collision—something that Miss Carrington had not done.

All that he said to the severe teacher will never be known; but Bobby heard him say for one thing:

“Loyalty—even in school athletics—is a very good thing, Miss Carrington. You will admit that, yourself. And these girls are loyal students. I think they have been punished enough, don't you? Besides, I fear the testimony you chanced to hear was prejudiced. This Hester Grimes has been in trouble before for giving untruthful testimony against a fellow-classmate. Am I not right?”

“And very honorably she admitted her fault afterward,” Miss Carrington declared.

“True. But let us not punish these two girls any longer; for Miss Grimes may have a change of heart again—when it is too late.”

It was with rather ill grace that Gee Gee ever owned up that she was wrong, even on minor points. She therefore simply called the twins to her desk after school, and said:

“It has been represented to me that you are

needed in these rowing contests for the good of the school. Personally I believe that athletics is occupying the minds of all you girls too much. But as your conduct during the past fortnight has been very good, I will remove the obstacle to your rowing with your schoolmates again. That is all."

There was what Bobby called "a regular love feast" at the boathouse that afternoon. It was not practice day; but when Professor Dimp heard of the return of the Lockwood twins to the crew he was delighted.

Public interest in Billy Long and his possible connection with the robbery of the department store had rather died out by this time. The friends of Short and Long had rallied around him, and he was not arrested. When his ankle was better he hobbled to school on crutches; but the boys missed him greatly on the ball field.

Billy told his chums that he was sure the two men he saw had hidden money somewhere about the caverns of the island; and not only were the boys of Central High interested in this "buried treasure," but their sisters as well.

"I tell you what," said Bobby Hargrew, on the Beldings' porch one evening when Laura had been having one of her "parties"; "let's organize and incorporate 'The Central High Treas-

ure Hunting Company, Limited,' and go over to Cavern Island and just dig it up by the roots till we find Billy's treasure in a lard kettle."

"Sounds terribly romantic," said Jess Morse.

"We had a scrumptious time over there at the other picnic," said Dorothy.

"I vote for another Saturday at the caverns, anyway," said Chet.

"Me, too," added Lance Darby.

"Well, you folks can guy me all you want to," said Short and Long, who was getting about with a cane now instead of his crutches. "But those fellers talked of money, and of burying it in a lard can."

"Say!" exclaimed Lance, "a lard can will hold a lot of money."

"All right. You laugh. I'm going to have another look for it when I get over there," said Billy.

"And I'm with you, Billy," said Josephine Morse, with a sigh. "Goodness me! I need to find a buried treasure, or something of the kind."

Jess's mother was a widow and in straitened circumstances, and sometimes Jess was cramped for clothing as well as spending money. She lived at the "poverty-stricken" end of Whiffle Street, just as the Beldings lived at the "wealthy" end.

So the party for the next Saturday was made up in this impromptu fashion, without one of the members realizing what an important occasion that outing would prove.

It looked to Dora and Dorothy, when they reached home that evening, as though they might have to "cut" the "treasure hunt," however. Aunt Dora had gone to bed quite ill, and before morning Mr. Lockwood telephoned for the doctor. He came and the family was up most of that night. Aunt Dora had caught cold and it had settled into a severe muscular rheumatic attack.

The poor lady suffered a great deal during the next few days, having considerable fever, and being quite out of her head at times. She called for "Dora" then, almost incessantly, and no matter which twin responded she declared it wasn't her namesake, but Dorothy, and that they "were trying to fool her!"

"And, oh, dear, me," said Dorothy, "I wish we hadn't done it, Dora."

"I wish so, too. When I tell her that *I'm* Dora she doesn't believe me."

"Poor Auntie!" sighed Dorothy. "I expect she has had her heart set on taking you home with her."

"Yes, it's preyed on her mind."

"I tell you what!" ejaculated Dorothy.

"What now?"

"Let me take your place. I'll go home with her—for a while, at least."

"No you won't! I'm Dora. I'll go with her," said the other twin, decisively. "And just think how she went to Mr. Sharp and got us off from Gee Gee's decision."

"But you mustn't go with her to stay all the time, Dora. That would kill me!" cried Dorothy.

"No. But I'll go a little while this summer. We'll have to do something for her. I expect she's lonely in her big house with nobody but servants."

Thus the twins tried to quiet their consciences—they really had *two* of those unfortunate arrangements. And the consciences would not be quieted easily. The girls ran home from school the next afternoon before they went to the boat-house; and were prepared to cut practice had Aunt Dora needed them.

But fortunately the patient was asleep, and the twins hurried down to take their places in the shell. The Big Day was now approaching. There were not many more afternoons on which the girls might practice for the races.

"We mustn't disappoint the other girls, and

the whole school, and give up the eight-oared shell practice," Dora said to Dorothy.

"No; but if Aunt Dora is going to be ill long we will have to give up our canoe work. Let Hester Grimes and Lil Pendleton beat us in that, if they will. Aunt Dora needs us—and we owe her some gratitude, if nothing more," agreed her twin.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STOLEN SHELL

THE very next morning Bobby Hargrew came screeching into the rear gate of the Lockwood premises as though she was being chased by a bear.

“For the land of pity’s sake!” gasped Mrs. Betsey, appearing on the back porch, while Mary put her red head out of the kitchen window, and both of them waved admonitory hands at Bobby to still her shrieks. “What is the matter with that girl of Tom Hargrew’s?” demanded the old housekeeper.

The twins came flying. Fortunately Aunt Dora was asleep, but they all feared Bobby’s calliope-like voice would awaken the patient.

“Listen here! Listen here!” cried Bobby, smothering some of the upper register, but still quite “squally” enough, in all conscience, as Mrs. Betsey said.

“We’re listening, Bobby! Do tell us what it is,” cried the twins in unison.

"The shell is gone!" cried Bobby.

"Gone where?"

"What shell?"

"Our new shell. And if I knew where it was gone I wouldn't be telling you about how it was stolen, for it would be an old story then," said Bobby, panting.

"You don't mean to say that the new shell has been taken out of the boathouse—and a watchman there?"

"That's what I mean. It's gone," said Bobby, solemnly. "Mike, the watchman, doesn't know when it was taken. One of the big doors was forced open and our beautiful shell has disappeared. There are two launches out searching the lake for it."

"But who would have done such a thing?" cried Dorothy.

"And what could be their object?" demanded her sister.

"Ask me an easier one," said the grocery-man's daughter. "I only know it's gone, and the intention evidently is to make us Central High girls lose the race."

"Oh, who would be so mean?" gasped one of the twins.

"There are four other contestants in the eight-oared class," said Bobby, grimly.

"You don't believe any of the other girls have stolen the shell?" cried Dora, in horror.

"Why, Bobby! how could they do it? And in the night, too?" demanded Dorothy.

"I don't say who did it. But it may have been somebody hired to do it by some other crew."

"Keyport?" suggested Dora, doubtfully.

"They're the very best crew on the lake—next to ours," added Dorothy.

"And they probably think themselves the better of the two," said the shrewd Bobby. "I'd suspect either of the other three first."

"But it's just awful to suspect any of the other Highs. What a mean, mean trick!"

"If they'd only taken the old shell," wailed Dorothy.

"That's it. They knew we had little chance to beat them in the old shell. But some spy must have watched us and timed us in the new boat," said Bobby with decision. "And so—it went!"

"I can scarcely believe it," sighed Dorothy.

"But it must be found before the Big Day!" cried Dora.

"I guess that's what all the girls of Central High will say. But Lake Luna is a large body of water, and there are plenty of wild pieces

of shore where the shell could be hidden, in the mouth of a creek, or some such place. Or, perhaps it has been removed from the lake altogether. Oh, it may have been already destroyed."

"Dreadful!" groaned Dorothy.

"And we haven't paid for it, yet," added Dora.

The news of the shell's disappearance was well circulated over the Hill before schooltime. The girls of Central High could scarcely give proper attention to their textbooks that morning. Some of the members of the crew actually wept. It was the afternoon for practice, and there were only a few more such opportunities.

There was no news of the lost boat when school was out. The police had been notified, and the police launch had taken up the search. The watchman at the boat houses was made to admit that it had been his custom to sleep most of the night. There had never been any robbery of the school boathouses before. But, as Principal Sharp of Central High said, another watchman would doubtless be able to keep awake better than Mike, and the old man received his notice.

This stringent measure did not bring the lost shell back, however. Professor Dimp had the

girls out in the old shell that afternoon, and although they did their very best, they fell back more than forty seconds in half a mile. And from what they knew about Keyport, the girls of Central High knew very well that they could not afford to drop those forty seconds if they were to win the Luna Boat Club's cup.

There wasn't a girl in Central High—unless it was Hester Grimes—who did not consider the loss of the new shell a calamity. Theories of the wildest nature were put forward to explain the robbery. That the shell had been stolen for the sake of profit was hardly likely. Eight-oared shells cannot be pledged at a pawn shop; nor would any other rowing club purchase such a boat without knowing just where the craft came from.

Really, Bobby Hargrew's belief that one of the competing crews had caused the shell to be spirited away gained ground among the school pupils as a body. Yet there was no trace of the course of the robbers, and the search of the borders of the lake was fruitless.

The newspapers took it up and the theory that one of the competing crews had caused the shell's disappearance was printed. This forced some discussion of the matter before the Board of Education, and the minority which had always

been against competitions between the schools gained some strength.

Above all, it looked bad for the Central High crew. They all knew in their hearts that with the heavy and lubberly old shell which was left them, they could not win the race on the Big Day. This thought took the heart out of them and on Friday afternoon, when they practiced, their showing was even worse than it had been before.

Saturday the "Treasure Hunters" had their outing at Cavern Island. They went in several small boats, and the twins, finding Aunt Dora much improved (or seemingly so) joined the party at the last moment and paddled their canoe with the rest.

"Oh, my, my!" cackled Lance Darby as he slid into a seat in Chet's boat that Josephine Morse had been about to take. "Awful accident on the Lake! Terrible Catastrophe While Boating on Luna! Lady had Her Eye on a Seat and a Gent Sat on It! My, my!"

"You needn't think you're so smart," returned Jess. "Now you're there, you can row—both you and Chet. Laura and I will sit here in the stern and watch you both work. Work is good for boys, anyway."

"Yes," growled Chet. "It's like what they

say about the fleas on dogs. A certain number of fleas are good for a dog; helps him keep his mind off the fact that he *is* a dog!"

Short and Long balanced the big boat by sitting in the bow, and the fleet got under way.

"We're going right to Boulder Head, aren't we?" demanded Short and Long.

"Is that where the treasure is buried?" asked Laura, laughing.

"It's somewhere around there; or in the caves. You folks can laugh," said Billy, "but those foreigners talked enough English for me to understand that the money——"

"In a lard kettle," put in Bobby, chuckling.

"In a lard can," corrected Billy, "was hidden on the island, and was not far from the caves."

"Maybe when the man you said was hanging around so long disappeared, he took the treasure with him," laughed Dorothy Lockwood.

"And I bet I know who the two men were whom Billy heard quarreling over a lard can," cried Dora.

"You know, do you?" demanded Billy. "Well, who were they?"

"Tony Allegretto and the man the police found him fighting with," said Dora promptly.

"Great Scott!" gasped Chetwood Belding. "Do you hear that, Lance?"

"Never thought of 'em!" answered his chum.

"Buried treasure, too!" said Chet, thoughtfully. "Tony said they were quarreling over money."

"There is something that needs looking into about Tony Allegretto," declared Mother Wit, seriously. "Don't you think so, Chet?"

"It might be well to find out what the money was, and where they got it to quarrel over," agreed Chet, slowly.

"Pirate gold, of course!" laughed Bobby Hargrew, from another boat. "Don't spoil all the romance of this treasure hunt by suggesting that the buried loot is merely the proceeds of the sale of a banana stand that the two Italians owned in partnership."

CHAPTER XXIII

BILLY'S GREAT DIVE

BUT both Chet and Laura Belding were thoughtful for the rest of the way to the island. The others seemed to see nothing significant in what Billy had said about the two Italians, or the suggestion the twins had made that the quarreling men were identical with Tony Allegretto, the trained monkey's master, and his fellow countryman, whom the police had driven away from Cavern Island.

"We ought to find some clue to the buried treasure, something like Poe's 'Gold Bug,'" suggested Nellie Agnew.

"Sure!" cried Lance. "So many fathoms from a certain tree with arms like a gibbet, on a line with a stone on which is scratched the outline of a skull. Then dig straight down—so far—till you strike——"

"A lard kettle!" cried Jess. "Sounds just like Poe, doesn't it?"

"Just like Poe's ravin'," chuckled Bobby, the

only one who dared make such an atrocious pun.

They piled out of the boats at the usual landing and Billy took them to the several "hide-outs," or camps, he had found while he was living like a castaway on the island.

The twins were as eager to see Billy's camps as anyone; the big boulder before the mouth of the farther cavern, into which they did not dare to venture without a guide, had been the boy's lookout. That was where he was perched in his wig and whiskers when Dora and Dorothy had first seen him and nicknamed him "the lone pirate."

"And how under the sun did you chance to have that Hallow E'en disguise with you, Billy boy?" demanded Dora.

Short and Long grinned. "I didn't know but one of those fresh detectives was hanging around the house when I went off fishing that morning; so I put on the wig and whiskers before I slid down the woodshed roof."

"By jolly!" laughed Lance. "You must have looked like a gnome when you went through the streets."

"Nobody saw me. It was before sun-up," said Billy.

Dorothy had scrambled to the top of the big rock. Suddenly she uttered a loud screech.

"What's bit you now?" demanded Chet, starting up.

"Oh! my trophy pin! It's dropped off my blouse directly into the water. Oh, dear me! I won that in the relay races this spring."

"And the water's deep there," declared Bobby. "It's a regular diving hole."

"Now, you've lost it!" cried Dora, sadly. "But you can wear mine sometimes."

"Don't you fret, Miss—which is it, Dora, or Dorothy?" demanded Billy.

"I'm Dorothy," admitted the twin in question, climbing sadly down to the shore again.

"That's all right, Dorothy," said Short and Long. "Leave it to me. I put my bathing trunks in my pocket and while you girls are spreading the luncheon over yonder I'll dive and see if I can get the pin. It's some muddy down there, I guess; but I can stay under water nearly two minutes—can't I, Chet?"

"So you have, Billy. You try it. And if you can't, maybe Lance or I can get it."

Billy retired into the nearest cave to remove his clothing and the girls returned to the landing. In five minutes Billy made a famous dive into the deep hole under the boulder. He did not stay down two minutes, for Lance timed him. And he came up without the pin, but when he

got his breath, he gave voice to a shout that started the echoes.

"What's the matter with you, Billy?" demanded Chet.

"I've found it!" cried the small boy.

"Good! give it to me and I'll run with it to Dorothy," said Lance.

"Oh! I haven't found her old pin," said Billy.

"What's the matter with you, then?" demanded Chet. "You said you'd found it."

"And so I have," proclaimed the diver.

"Then hand it over," said Lance.

"But it's down there—and it's hitched to a chain," gasped Billy.

"What are you talking about?" cried both his boy friends together.

"*I've found the lard can!*" shrieked Billy, dancing up and down on the rock.

"Great Scott!" spoke Chet, staring at him.

"You don't mean it?" cried Lance.

"The lard can with the money?" demanded Chet, shaking the smaller boy by the arm.

"How do I know whether there is money in it or not?" returned Billy. "Lemme find where the end of that chain is hitched, and we'll drag it out of the mud and see."

"Say! Talk about treasure hunting!" gasped Lance. "This beats 'em all!"

Splash! went Billy again into the water, like a huge frog. In a minute he was at the surface again, with the end of a trace chain in his hand.

"Catch hold here, fellows, and pull!" he gasped.

Chet and Lance obeyed. With a strong heave they brought the weight ashore. It certainly *was* a lard can; but the cover was soldered on.

"How we going to cut it open?" demanded Lance, eagerly, as Billy crawled out on shore again.

"We're not going to open it," declared Chet, decisively. "This can is going directly to police headquarters. And all of us want to keep our mouths close shut about it until the police have examined the contents."

And this he impressed rigidly upon the rest of the party when Billy had dressed and the three boys went back to the landing. Unfortunately Dorothy's pin was not recovered. But, as she said herself, she didn't mind that, seeing that her loss of the pin brought about the discovery of the buried treasure.

"It beats Captain Kidd, and 'Treasure Island,' and Poe's 'Gold Bug,' all rolled into

one!" declared Bobby, as a final comment upon the whole adventure.

The party was eager to get across to the city again and deliver the sealed can to the authorities. So the picnic was considerably shortened. Nevertheless, the Central High Treasure Hunting Company, Limited, was pronounced an overpowering success!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BIG DAY

BUT the boys and girls of Central High learned nothing that day about the contents of the sealed lard can. Whatever was discovered inside it the police kept very close about.

Chet had a private interview with the Chief of the Centerport Bureau of Detectives, and so did Billy Long. Short and Long wished that he could get through with police interference in his affairs, and grumbled some; but the detectives treated him pretty nicely this time, and the two boys went home wondering what would be the outcome of the "treasure hunting expedition."

"Just the same, we found something!" ejaculated Chet. "And it is important, I feel sure."

"Wish it was the money stolen from Stresch & Potter. The firm has offered five hundred dollars reward for the recovery of the money and the apprehension of the burglars," said Short and Long.

"Say! that would be great for you," his friend said. "Wouldn't it?"

"We'd take Alice out of that factory and let her finish High," said Billy, quickly. "That's what we'd do at the Long domicile."

"I hope it *is* the stolen money, then," said Chet.

"Hot chance of that," scoffed Billy. "Those fellows that 'burgled' the store got away weeks ago and have probably spent the money by this time."

The discovery of the sealed can on the island did not banish from the minds of the girls of Central High, however, the mystery of the stolen shell. This was a tragedy that loomed bigger and bigger as the day of the races approached. And it was very near now.

The twins were delighted to be able to row with their mates on the eight-oared crew; but like the other members, they were quite hopeless of winning the race *if* they had to use the old boat.

"Somebody who owed us a big grudge turned that trick of stealing the shell," Bobby Hargrew declared, again and again.

"But we never did anything to the crews of the other schools to make them hate us so," cried the doctor's daughter.

"Only threatening to beat them in the race," said Laura, doubtfully.

"That shouldn't be a sufficient reason for them to hate us," one of the Lockwood twins declared. "It does just seem as though it was done out of spite."

"And who's so spiteful toward the Central High eight?" demanded Bobby, keenly.

"Now, Bobby!" cautioned Laura.

"That's all right, Mother Wit. You see the point just as clearly as I do," declared Bobby. "You know who's been 'knocking' our crew all the time——"

"Why—you don't mean——" began Jess, in wide-eyed wonder; but Laura said:

"Hush! Don't say such a thing. We must not accuse people without some ground for suspicion."

"How much ground do you want—the whole earth?" snapped Bobby, in deep gloom.

So the name of the suspected culprit was not mentioned; but the little coterie of friends looked wisely at each other, and nodded.

For, you see, when a girl is disloyal to her school and classmates, how can they help suspecting her if evil should arise? A girl who will not accept the decision of the majority in school affairs, who scoffs at the efficiency of the

various athletic teams—who never will be contented unless she is in the lead of everything—can neither be popular nor trusted. Disloyalty is a crime that every right-minded person abhors; and although these girls did not mention the name of the person they suspected, all realized who was meant when Bobby said:

“Well, the time is coming when she’ll fly her kite too high! Everybody will see what she is, and then she’ll never be able to fool anybody again—neither teachers, nor students of Central High. That’s one satisfaction.”

“And yet, not very satisfactory at present,” returned Laura Belding, thoughtfully.

“Put on your thinking cap, then, Mother Wit, and catch her,” said Bobby, in a whisper. “You did it before, you know.”

The parents of some of the girls were intensely interested in the outcome of the races on the Big Day, too; and somebody with influence had induced the Chief of Police to put detectives on the trail of the lost shell. This, however, beside a search of the lake shore by the police launch, as already reported, did nothing toward uncovering the hiding place of the shell, or the identity of the thieves.

It seemed ridiculous to suppose that one girl—no matter how spiteful she might feel—could

have accomplished the crime of stealing the eight-oared shell alone. Yet Bobby Hargrew's insistence had impressed Laura Belding.

Perhaps, too, the fact that the other girls of Central High expected something brilliant in the way of detective work from Mother Wit spurred the jeweler's daughter to attempt to find the lost shell.

Instead, she attempted to make the guilty person return the new boat in time for the boat race. And to do this she tried a scheme that might have been fruitless had the culprit not been an amateur in deceit and wrongdoing. No real thief would have fallen into Laura Belding's trap.

She caused to be printed and posted upon the bulletin boards all over the Hill section of Centerport a quarter-sheet handbill which read in part that the person having caused the disappearance of the new eight-oared shell belonging to the Girls' Branch Athletic League of Central High was known, and that person would be publicly exposed if the shell was not returned, or the place of its hiding revealed, in season for the races. And she signed the bill with Professor Dimp's name, he having agreed to lend it for the occasion.

This was not many hours before the dawning

of the day of the races; but Laura saw to it that the way to and from school for the person suspected was fairly plastered with those notices! Printed in their black type, they could not fail to be seen by the right eyes.

"What do you expect will come of *that*?" demanded Chet, rather inclined to scoff at his sister's plan.

"I hope it will cause a change of heart on the part of the person guilty of the outrage," declared Laura, laughing.

"Huh! If I knew who it was that stole the shell I'd go to 'em with a policeman."

"And then it would be denied, and we'd never get our shell back in time. We don't know where it is," said Laura.

"And you evidently don't know just who is guilty," responded Chet.

"Moral certainty would not hold good in court," his sister returned, slyly.

"Bet you nothing comes of it!" growled Chet.

But Laura would not wager anything with him. Perhaps she was not very certain in her own mind, at that, that she had gone about the matter in the right way.

The night before the Big Day arrived, and nothing was heard of the shell. The girls were

hopeless. Even Bobby lost her last atom of cheerfulness. They were confident that, if they had to row in the old boat, Keyport, at least, would beat them in the race.

But when the new watchman opened the boat-house doors early on the morning of the race day he found pinned to the door a paper which bore in scraggly lettering this admonition:

"Look under the east float."

He proceeded to do this at once; and there was the shell, missing for so many anxious days, somewhat scraped by being washed by the current against the timbers underneath the float, but otherwise quite fit for use!

All the girls of Central High did not hear this welcome news untill noon, when the schools of Centerport let out for the day. The afternoon was to be given up to the aquatic contests, and troops of boys and girls, as well as grown folks, went to the shore, or crowded the boats that were stationed along the racing course.

After all the Lockwood twins did not have to give up the canoe contest. Aunt Dora would not hear of their losing practise; and she was so much improved that Mr. Lockwood hired an easy carriage and took her to the races that she might see Dora and Dorothy do their best to win both the canoeing and eight-oared trophies.

"They are real good girls, after all, Lemuel," said Aunt Dora, reflectively. "Now both of them have offered to go home with me."

"No!" cried the flower lover. "I can't spare them, Dora."

"I know you can't," admitted his sister, rather mildly for her. "And although they only said they would come to me for a little while, one at a time, I am not going to accept their sacrifice. I see plainly how much they are to each other—and to you. I guess they are yours, Lemuel, and if you have made mistakes in bringing them up, they are too sweet of disposition naturally to be spoiled by your foolishness."

"No," said Aunt Dora, conclusively, "the place for Dora is with Dorothy, and the place for Dorothy is with Dora. Besides," she added, "it would certainly trouble me to have them about. I never *could* be sure whether my namesake was visiting me, or the other one!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE RACE IS WON

LAKE LUNA was a blaze of glory between Centerport and Cavern Island—the June sunshine over all and every boat along the racing course bright with pennants and streamers. The two fussy little launches bearing the officers who managed the races puffed up and down the open water, and the big police launch kept the spectators' boats back of the line.

Ashore the highlands were black with spectators, while the driveway was crowded with vehicles of every description. Keyport and Lumberport had been drawn upon to swell the crowds of lookers-on. The railroads and steamboats had brought crowds to the race. It was indeed a gala day.

Promptly at one o'clock the events began. The trial of speed between the boys' eight-oared shells was the first of the juvenile contests, and these latter trials gained almost as much interest from the crowds as did the first races.

The boys of Central High, with Chet and Lance and six others at the sculls, and Short and Long to steer, pulled a splendid race, and came in second—the junior crew of the famous Luna Boat Club being the winner. At least the boys of Central High won over the crews of all the other high schools on the lake.

The canoe race was a mixed event, for there was no sex limitation in canoeing. The Lockwood twins had been chosen, after all, to represent Central High, and Hester Grimes and Lily Pendleton were not even among the spectators at the races. They had accused Mrs. Case of "favoritism," although their record for speed was much below that of the twins.

Dora and Dorothy did their very best; but they could scarcely expect to win over all comers in this race. Like the boys' eight, however, they came in ahead of all the other school crews, being Number 3 at the finish. The race was won by grown men belonging to the Luna Boat Club.

After that the interest centered in the trial of speed between the girls' eights of the five high schools. They had already been flashing about the lower course, "warming up," and as the five came into line at the signal of the starter, they presented a pretty sight.

Blue and white and crimson and white were

the prevailing colors of the girls' blouses and skirts; but the East High girls wore black and gold. Blue blouses and skirts, with narrow white trimming, was the costume of Central High, and the nine girls in the graceful, polished cedar shell were cheered again and again as they came opposite the grandstand and boat-houses.

There was Colonel Richard Swayne, who used to be so much opposed to girls' athletics, waving his cap, his bald head shining in the sun. And Principal Sharp was beside him, likewise cheering for his own crew.

Back on the driveway Aunt Dora actually stood up and waved her umbrella in recognition of the twins as the shell belonging to Central High came easily to the line. There were Laura's and Chet's parents, too, in the automobile; with Mrs. Morse and the doctor's wife; and even Alice Long, with Tommy, the irrepressible, and Katie and May, were all there, shouting and waving handkerchiefs, all hoping that the girls in the eight-oared shell would notice them.

Eve and Otto Sitz had ridden in to view the race; but they were in Prettyman Sweet's repaired launch, and Laura could hear the voice of the Swiss girl calling to her. The twins saw

Aunt Dora and their father standing up in the carriage; but it was against the rules for the participants to notice the cheering crowd.

"Eyes in the boat, girls! Make ready!" snapped Bobby, bending forward in her seat. "He's getting ready to fire that pistol."

Celia Prime settled herself for the first stroke. "All ready?" she asked, and the girls behind her—Jess Morse, Dorothy Lockwood, Mary O'Rourke, Roberta Fish, Nellie Agnew, Dora Lockwood and Laura Belding—all murmured their acquiescence. The starter looked along the line of shells and got a nod from each coxswain.

The pistol spoke, and "They're off!" shouted the crowd. Like five huge water-spiders, the eight-oared shells darted along the course. With a strain and a heave at the end of every stroke, the boats were propelled in a magnificent burst of speed. For some rods there was scarcely any difference in the standing of the five crews.

Then, as in old times, Keyport drew ahead.

"Hang to 'em! Like bulldogs!" shouted Bobby Hargrew through the megaphone she wore strapped to her mouth.

Instantly Celia stretched out a little more and the clack of the oars in Central High boat sounded quicker. The new shell sped on and

its bow was almost instantly at the stern of Keyport's boat. Behind, the other three crews were spread out badly. Only Lumberport was coming up at all. East and West Highs were nowhere from the start.

The Keyport crew were pulling with all their might and main then, and they were still a long way from the line.

"Steady!" said Celia, through her teeth. "This will pass them."

Bobby gave the order to increase the stroke. The crew of Central High responded nobly. The bow of their boat crept up, slowly but surely, along the side of the Keyport craft. They could have passed the rival boat more quickly; but Celia was holding back reserve force for a spurt if such a thing became necessary.

The twins' toughened muscles did not feel the strain at first; but before the end of the course was sighted they were working blindly, like the other girls—mere pieces of mechanism engaged in a task that, as it continued, became a punishment! But that was what all the long weeks of practice and exercise had been for. Their bodies had learned to endure strains like this—and their wills, too.

The crowds in the boats and along the banks had never ceased to cheer and shout encourage-

ment to their favorite crews. The race ended in a whirlwind finish, for Keyport endeavored to rally at the last. But then Central High with their new shell were a boat's length ahead, and they had kept that lead until they crossed the line.

Central High had won! The race had been a better one than that rowed a few weeks before between the same crews. The beautiful cup presented by the Luna Boat Club would have the place of honor in the Girls' Branch Athletic League house, when the latter structure was completed.

"We sha'n't have a chance to row with you infants again," said Mary O'Rourke, one of the seniors, who would be graduated from Central High in a few days; "but see that you do as well next term."

"And keep all friction out of the crew," advised Celia, as they pulled easily back to the boat-house.

"That means keep out Hester Grimes," said Bobby, *sotto-voce*. "We want to keep her out of all athletics if we are to win over the other schools. She'll queer our basket-ball team next."

Whether Bobby's prophecy was correct, or no, must be judged by the perusal of the next volume of this series, entitled "The Girls of Central

High at Basket-ball; Or, The Great Gymnasium Mystery."

When the crew of the eight-oared shell reached the boathouse they learned of a happening which interested them deeply. The minute the boys' eight-oared shell of Central High had come in, a policeman had beckoned Chetwood Belding and Billy Long away. The boys were highly excited by this incident, and naturally their girl friends were, too.

But it was not until the last event of the day had been decided and the crowd of spectators had broken up and gone their ways that the young folk learned the mystery. Chet and Billy had been called to the Detective Bureau, where the chief met them with rather a severe countenance.

"So you two boys had no idea what was in that lard can you brought in here the other day?" he demanded.

"No, sir," said Chet, manfully. "Billy heard those two men talking about it. And he found it. He says he thinks there is money in it."

"And I should say there was!" ejaculated the police detective, with disgust. "Those Italians had us all fooled. We got the big fellow, who was sneaking back to try and get on the island again, and of course Tony Allegretto and

his monkey has always been right under our eyes.

"By the way, Master Long!"

"Yes, sir?" answered Billy, wondering what was coming.

"You said you thought those men surveying back of Stresch & Potter's the day before the burglary, were working for the railroad?"

"That's what I thought, sir. I gathered it from what they said."

"And so they were. They were from the engineer's office of the C., P. & L. We found 'em. They had nothing to do with the robbery."

"I didn't think they had. These two dagoes know about the robbery, though!" exclaimed Short and Long, his eyes twinkling.

"I guess they do! I guess they do!" repeated the detective. "And the money stolen from Stresch & Potter was in that soldered can. We got it. We got the men. And the five hundred dollars will be divided between this office and you boys."

"Not me!" cried Chet. "It belongs to Billy. He dived and found the can. And—and I rather think he's paid for his reward by what he went through over there on Cavern Island."

"Perhaps that's so," said the official, chuckling.

"But tell me, sir!" cried Billy, eagerly, "who

got through that little window and opened the door for the Italians?"

"Ha! that puzzled us a bit until one of our sharp young men watched Tony putting that monkey of his through its tricks. Then we all saw a great light."

"Great Scott! And so do I see a light!" cried Chet.

"Me, too," grumbled Billy. "But why didn't I guess it before and save myself all that trouble I had?"

"The monkey is the guilty party," said the detective. "The bigger Italian is a famous safe-cracker. He hired Tony Allegretto and his monkey to help him get into the building, and to watch outside. Then the two men quarreled as to the division of the loot after it was hidden. But they are both in jail, now—and the monkey, too. But Mr. Monk will never have a chance to open his master's cell-door again. Now, you'll hear all about this later, boys, and you will both have to testify when the case comes to trial. That's all."

"Huh!" exclaimed Short and Long, as he went away with Chet, "looks like as though everybody had the laugh on me—eh?"

"How's that?" queried Chet, in some surprise.

"Why, I needn't have made such a Jack of myself as to run away and hide over there on the island. Father's said a-plenty to me about it. He says that any boy who runs away instead of facing the music makes himself appear guilty right at the start."

"Well—I—don't—know," said his friend, slowly. "Certain sure you worried your folks a whole lot—and worried your friends, too."

"I never thought of that."

"I s'pose not. That detective chasing you up so, was what scared you."

"And you'd have been scared, too. He said he could put me in jail. Now, I'd just as soon be half starved over there on Cavern Island as to be in jail," declared Billy, with conviction.

"Say! One thing you got out of it young fellow," said Chet, suddenly, with a laugh. "And you wouldn't have got that if you hadn't run away."

"Oh! do you really think they'll give me part of the reward?"

"Of course they will. They'll have to. Father will have his lawyer 'tend to that for you, Billy. The police sha'n't cheat you out of your rights."

"Then," cried Billy, delight showing in his face. "I tell you what's going to happen if I get all that money."

"What?" asked Chet, curiously.

"Alice is going back to Central High to finish out her last year. You know, she would have graduated two years ago this June if it hadn't been for her having to stay home to 'tend to the kids. She shall come back. I know she wants to be a teacher, and without her High School certificate she cannot go to Normal."

"Well, you're a good kind of a kid, after all, Billy," said Chet Belding. "Even if you are full of tickle," and he grinned at the small boy.

"Thanks," sniffed Billy Long. "Did you think that nobody but *you* appreciates a good sister? Lemme tell you, Mother Wit isn't the only girl around these corners that's as good as any boy alive!"

Chet laughed aloud at this. "That's sure a backhand compliment," he said. "Most of the girls of Central High think they're a whole lot better than the boys."

"And gee! Ain't they?" rejoined Billy, with feeling.

They were back at the landing in time to escort the winning girls' crews up to the athletic field and listen to the speeches. Colonel Swayne made the best one of the day, and certainly the one that was most appreciated by the girls of Central High when he announced that the con-

tracts for the building of the new gymnasium were closed and that the building was bound to surpass anything of the kind in the State.

"And I declare you deserve it!" said Colonel Swayne, in conclusion. "You certainly are the finest class of girls I ever did see. You are not like what girls were when I was a boy—I must say that. But, I guess different times breeds different folks. It must be all right for girls now to be athletic and be able to row like boys, and play ball, and all that.

"And I certainly was proud that I lived on the Hill to-day, and that my neighbors' daughters were such strong and healthy young ladies. It has been the greatest day we've seen on Lake Luna for many a year. I'm proud of you all!"

There was a reception that evening at the chapter house of the M. O. R.'s, Central High's very popular secret society, and the girls who had taken part in the aquatic events were feasted and made much of by the members of the society and the teachers and friends invited for the occasion.

It was a very happy time for the girls of Central High. Even Miss Carrington was in an especially gracious mood; but Aunt Dora, who had come with the twins, refused to speak to "that four-eyed teacher."

Bobby Hargrew was there, although she could never hope to be a member of the M. O. R.'s herself, unless she changed her mischievous ways. "But," as Laura quoted, "can the leopard change his spots?"

"He most certainly can—unless he goes dead lame," cried Bobby, grinning. "You wait till I'm a junior! I'm going to make the M. O. R.'s and be Gee Gee's prize scholar next year."

"Better practice a little now, Bobby," advised Nellie Agnew. "Then it won't come so hard to begin in September."

Dora and Dorothy went home early from the "party" with Aunt Dora. The old lady was still afraid of the night air.

"And I'll come to see you—for a while—right after graduation," Dora said to her aunt, cheerfully. "And then Dorothy will take my place——"

"No. You can both come—come together. I couldn't stand you more than a week at a time, I'm sure," said Aunt Dora, with a sigh. "You girls of the new generation are too much for me; though I must admit that you are pretty nice girls, at that! But your father needs you most of the time—needs you to help him cultivate that seedless watermelon, I expect!

"Girls aren't what they were when *I* was a

girl. You twins don't know how to knit, or to make tatting, or to embroider. It seems a shame—for you'll never have any tidies for your chairs in your house.

"But I must admit that you are well and strong, you two girls. And your ma was that delicate! For those that like 'em I s'pose these athletics are good. I only hope we won't have women pugilists and seven-day bicycle riders!

"When girls like you and your friends race in boats and—ahem!— I hope you won't let any club of girls from the other High Schools take that handsome silver cup away from you, girls," concluded Aunt Dora, with sudden asperity. "That *would* be a pretty dido, I must say! Don't you let me hear of its passing out of the possession of the girls of Central High."

"We'll do *our* best, Auntie," replied Dora and Dorothy, their bright eyes dancing at the good old lady's emphasis.

THE END

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